A large, white, round church with a conical roof and a group of cyclists in the foreground. The church has a thick white wall and a dark, shingled conical roof. There are several small, dark, rectangular windows near the top of the wall. The church is surrounded by a black metal fence. In the foreground, a group of cyclists wearing helmets and casual clothing are gathered, some standing and some on their bikes. The background shows a clear blue sky and some greenery.

Your guide to the Viking and Early Middle Ages

South Scania, Bornholm
and parts of Pomerania

Contents



The author of this guide book is Sven Rosborn, with a contribution about Pomeranian history from Andrzej Kuczkowski.

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Introduction

Vikings and the Viking Age constitute one of the most characteristic aspects of Scandinavian history. The concept of “Viking” is used virtually everywhere nowadays, in a wide range of contexts. If it’s not football fans wearing horn-topped helmets, then it’s companies using the word in their names or products, or films, books etc., based on the Viking theme. Despite this interest, there are in fact very few people who really know what the Viking Age was all about. For most, mention of Vikings conjures up images of primitive barbarians raiding and pillaging Europe. But this image is all too crude, and is for the most part misleading. What about life at home in Scandinavia? What about the women and children? And who were the traders who made it all the way to China?

Every year, an abundance of material on the Viking theme is published, with the main focus on Vikings and Northmen and their travels around Western Europe and in Russia. But Poland and its relationship to Scandinavia a thousand years ago seems strangely enough to have been left out of the telling of Viking history. This is quite remarkable, considering that Poland with its vast lands and large population must have played a significant role in the history of Northern Europe, even in those distant times. In the countries south of the Baltic Sea, the focus lies not on the Scandinavian Vikings, but on the Slav culture – a powerful culture consisting of a number of peoples whose settlements covered most of Eastern Europe.

This book is an attempt to span historical bridges across the southern Baltic Sea, between Scania, Bornholm and northern Poland. It’s time to take an integrated approach to these three areas, not least to do justice to their common history. This book also describes some places that can still be visited today and that bear witness to a thousand-year-old history.

Three unlikely encounters

Imagine gathering some people together in a room for one sole purpose - to let them converse. Not entirely unheard of, but then imagine them coming from different times! So different that they could never have met physically! That would be special, and possibly quite exciting.

In these next three chapters, I have gathered together six powerful characters, men and women, to give a picture of times long past. I hope that you'll find their account of life around the southern Baltic Sea a thousand years ago as enriching as I did.

And who am I?

I am Sven Rosborn from Foteviken Viking Reserve. Although I have never travelled physically in time, I am used to moving in and out of different times. Sometimes I take on my viking robes and spend weeks on end living at the Viking Reserve. Other times I enjoy the comforts of modern living and sit in my cosy chair, while I recreate the past in three dimensions on a computer screen. All this moving in and out of the present and the past makes me the perfect person to conduct conversations with people who are no longer alive, but whom I can see right before my eyes.



At first I was a little scared about meeting these powerful men and women – although I had read about them, they were strangers to me. On the one hand I wanted to ask so many questions now that I had the opportunity – on the other hand I didn't want to be rude and too nosy. But looking back at my six meetings I think I handled them rather well – what do you think?

Mieszko I and Ingegerd

The first encounter is between a man and a woman who are closely related, though separated by time – the one is the great-grandparent of the other. The elder died in A.D. 992, some ten years before his great-granddaughter was born. To him, the encounter thus comes as a surprise - to her, it brings an opportunity to get to know more about a man she surely has heard a lot about already.

Who are they then, these people, my first historical guests? None lesser than a King, and a Saint! Mieszko I was known as the first king of Poland. His date of birth remains obscure, but the year of his death, 992, is firmly established. Ingegerd's grandmother on her father's side was Gunhilda, the daughter of Mieszko. Ingegerd was born ca 1001 and died in 1050 as Irene of Kiev, queen consort of King Yaroslav the Wise.

We meet in the Polish town of Koszalin, a town near the Baltic Sea coast, with its roots in the Middle Ages. Today it has a population of over 100,000. About 130 km to the west lies the harbour town of Swinoujście, with a frequent ferry service to Sweden.

My first question goes to the elder person in the group, Mieszko. He leans back comfortably in his chair, with his great-grandchild at his side.

“If I may ask of you sire, to tell me a little about your childhood, and how it came to be that you are so closely associated with Polish history? When, for instance, were you actually born? Many historians of my time wonder.”

“To tell you the truth, I don't know myself! Birth and exact age are



Map of Poland during the times of Mieszko I.

very much connected to the holy act of baptism, and I was born in a different faith. When my mother first held me in her arms, Christianity was not the religion of Polanie, or Poland, as people of your time call my country. A close enough guess would be the year 930, of your reckoning.”

Mieszko was of the Piast dynasty. According to the chronicles of Gallus Anonymus, legend has it that the dynasty was founded by Piast Kołodziej (Piast the Wheelwright) who would have been Mieszko's great-great-grandfather.

”In the manuscripts that survive, the year when you’re first mentioned is 963. This is then considered to be the year when Poland was established as a nation.”

Mieszko looks at me in disbelief.

”But lots of important things happened long before then!”

”Our knowledge is limited; documents seldom survive the ages. Archaeologists can uncover many remnants of the past, but never very many facts on what people felt or thought.”

”What a sketchy history you must be left with then – it’s almost laughable.”

”But now you can improve our knowledge! Not many people get such a chance!”

Mieszko mutters softly, the prospect obviously appeals to him.

”The realm I inherited was called Wielkopolska, or Greater Poland as it later became known, with its two important cities, Gniezno and Poznan. To prove myself worthy of my descent, I extended my realm to Kujavia, Mazovia and Pomerania. Well, the more you have, the more you want - but my neighbours to the east, the Russians, were too powerful to attack, and to the south I had the Chechs, at that time a people of great military might. Besides, going south would have ruined my marriage.”

”Your marriage?”

”In A.D. 961, the German emperor Otto, the first of many emperors named Otto, was planning to extend his realm towards the north-east, taking part of my land too. In order to do so, he’d obtained the Pope’s blessing to convert us Slavs to Christianity, which was just a pretext for letting the Germans invade us. To sweeten the Pope to his ideas, Otto had established a bishop in the German city of

Magdeburg and proclaimed it to be the Christian centre for all the Slavs he would convert – including my own people!”

”But what has this got to do with your wife?”

”You don’t know much about politics, do you? A good woman in such a politically precarious situation is worth ten thousand warriors. I simply went to King Boleslav, king of the Chechs and asked permission to marry his daughter, Dobrava. Marriage creates alliances, and alliances create power, so you see that women are very important in the political game. In addition, Dobrava was very beautiful, which made the alliance all the more pleasing to me! She became my bride in 966, but on one condition. Her father demanded that I let myself be baptised and become a Christian. Simple enough, and once I’d dipped my head into the holy water, I soon began to see its advantages.”



Modern depiction of the baptism of Mieszko I.

The woman at the table looks at her ancestral neighbour with more than a hint of a frown on her face.

”To be baptised is not a thing you do just for the fun of it. It is a holy act, to be taken seriously. You enter the community of Christ and thereby ...”

Mieszko slaps his hand down on the table, just hard enough mark his annoyance at being interrupted. Ingegerd huffs in contempt.

”Of course I appreciate that religion is important to many people. But name me one prince who hasn’t used religion for his own ends. By getting baptised I got Dobrava and an alliance with King Boleslav ... and in A.D. 968 I could myself establish a diocese in Poznan and start the building of a cathedral there, with a Polish bishop accountable directly to the Pope ... thus thwarting Otto’s aspirations to rule us Slavs. Religion brings many advantages, my dear great-grandchild!”

The atmosphere at the table was now more than a little fraught. Being a saint, Ingegerd obviously found her great-grandfather’s opinions on how to practise Christianity far removed from her own. I quickly decided to try and change the topic of the conversation.

”One important historical source is the writings of the Jewish travelling merchant Ibrahim Ibn Jaqub. Do you want to know what he wrote after having visited you?”

Without waiting for an answer, I start reading parts of the old text:

”The Slavic lands extend from the Syrian Sea in the South to the Ocean in the North ... Nowadays we have four kings: Bûislâw, the king of Bulgaria; the king of Prague, Bohemia and Krakow; Mescheqqo, king of the North; and Nâqûn, king of the far west. King Nâqûn’s land borders on Saxony and the lands of the mermâns.

King Mescheqqo’s realm is the greatest - rich in cereals, meat, honey and fish. He collects his taxes in coin to be able to pay for the upkeep of his army. Each month a fixed sum is paid out to every soldier. He has 3,000 men in chain mail armour, and a hundred of these men are worth 10,000 of any opponent’s. He provides his men with clothing, horses, weaponry and anything else they may need.

If a soldier should have a child, maintenance is immediately paid, regardless of whether the child is a boy or a girl. When the child comes of age, if it’s male, a wife is provided for the young man, along with a bride price to be paid to the girl’s father. If it’s a female, the girl is married off with a bride price paid to her father. Bride prices are high with the Slavs, if a man has two or three daughters his fortune is made; with only sons he will be impoverished.”

Mieszko, who has been listening attentively, now interrupts me:

”I remember Ibrahim – a strange man. Sent out by the Emir of some land in the far south, Spain, I believe it was. A very inquisitive man, asked about a lot of things. He was part of a large delegation from Northern Africa. They had first visited Emperor Otto the Great in Merseburg, so when he came to my court in 973, I was quite suspicious. But now I hear he wrote wisely about his visit to us.”

”But wasn’t he just flattering you? How could a hundred soldiers possibly defeat ten thousand men?”

This question does not please the former ruler of Poland! The friendly expression in the king’s eyes suddenly turns hostile, almost cruel. His young descendant quickly lays a gentle hand on his arm and his lordly anger subsides - whether because of her saintly qualities, or something else, I could not say.

”A prudent king keeps faithful men about him, well armed and well

trained. I would often make gifts to them of horses, saddles, bits and reins. Every month they got their wages from the taxes paid by the citizens. If a king takes care of his soldiers like he would his children, they will not think twice about dying for him. Such men are invincible. Such were my men.”

”Ibrahim also writes about your neighbours – the Russians to the east and the land of Brûs to the north. These two peoples seem to have been constantly at war with each other.”

”The Brûs lived on the coasts of what I think is called the Baltic Sea today. They had their own language that none of the neighbouring peoples could understand, and they were renowned for their bravery. They came down like one man on any attacking army. Without a thought for themselves they would hew away with their swords until the enemy or they themselves had fallen. The Russians lost most battles against these terrible opponents.”

”And what about the Slavic king Nâqûn, to the west?”

”Mmm ... a remarkable man. His land was prosperous. He had so many horses that he could sell them far and wide. Like myself, Nâqûn had a great army of valiant men with armour, helmets and swords. He lived in the castle ‘Grâd’; – ‘Grâd’ means the great castle.”

Again I wanted to prove to the old king that I had done my research and asked permission to read out some more of Ibrahim’s writings:



*Statue of Mieszko I in Cieszyn.
Sculpture by Jan Raszka.*

”The castle is named ‘Grâd’, the great castle, and to the South stands another castle, which is built according to Slavic custom, standing in a small lake. A suitable meadow with a good water supply and plentiful thickets is chosen, around which a moat is dug on the castle’s planned perimeter, square or round. The earth dug from the moat is built up into a mound, on top of which a wall of piles and planks is then erected to the desired height. A tower is built on one side, and the castle is reached across a wooden bridge. Grâd stands about 110 km from the sea.”

Mieszko looks at me, astonished.

”There’s no need to ask me if you already know it all! But you forgot to mention how difficult it was to bring armies into the lands of Nâqûn because of the difficult terrain – all marshes and thickets.”

”And what about the Ūbâbas? The Slavic tribe by the sea to the north-west, you haven’t forgotten them, have you?”

This question provokes another attack of rage. Mieszko stands up violently, knocking his chair over and looks at me with such anger that if this encounter had been for real, I would have had cause to be really frightened. Instead, I focus on persuading him to keep on talking.

”I apologise. Let’s leave that topic, for the time being at least. Tell me something about your customs instead. Were they very different from those of other people at the time, those in Denmark or Sweden for instance?”

”You come from Scania, don’t you? The province Harold Bluetooth conquered around 980?”

”It’s true that I’m from Scania, and it’s true that it was a part of Denmark for a long time, but now it’s part of Sweden.”

"Never mind Swedes or Danes. Or Norse for that matter - barbarians all of them! After I converted my country, Poland, to Christianity we became part of the civilised world under the Pope in Rome. Our contact with other countries increased and we could travel freely around Europe. But we didn't give up our old customs and traditions just because of that, of course."

"After his visit to you, the Jew Qazwini reported on your most remarkable way of finding out whether someone is guilty of a crime - how was that again?"

Mieszko looks at me, obviously at a loss.

"I mean the old Slavic custom of trial by fire"

"Hah! Why didn't you say fire at once? But yes, you're right; this way of deciding whether an accusation is true or false is known only among the Slavs. This is how it is done:

A person suspected of a crime where there are no witnesses to testify to his innocence, may clear himself of suspicion by calling on divine powers for assistance. First, two sticks are set in the ground. Then an iron rod is heated over fire, and when it is red-hot, it is placed glowing across the sticks. The accused washes his hands and grabs the rod with his bare hands. He has to walk three paces before letting go of the rod. His hands are then bandaged and he is watched closely for three days and three nights. If after this time his hands have come out in blisters he is guilty, if not he is innocent."

I look hesitantly at King Mieszko; my smile seems to surprise him.

"And you scoffed at others for having barbaric customs. What, then, do you call this?"

"You don't understand, my friend. Before the accused grabs the iron, he prays to the almighty God for help, and everything that

comes from God is right!"

"What about the water trial then? Is that justice guided by divine powers too?"

"Of course! The suspect was simply thrown into the water with hands and feet tied to a wooden pole. If he floated he was guilty, if he sank, he was innocent. But..." Mieszko hesitates, "sometimes the suspect drowned of course... but in any case, his innocence was established nevertheless!"

Mieszko has brightened up considerably now, so I venture to bring up the Ūbâbas again, the people who lived in the marshlands to the north-west of Mieszko's land, by the Baltic Sea coast. I'm very curious about them. Old manuscripts from the 10th century speak of a great city with twelve towers and a palisade-fortified harbour.

"It can't have been easy to have such fierce enemies as the Ūbâbas in the north-west? And heathens at that, who totally refused to accept the Christian faith?"

King Mieszko snorts sharply, but fortunately he does not go off in a huff again. Absentmindedly scratching his ear, he concedes to answer me.

"These people truly caused me a great deal of trouble. We were often at war with them, but the terrain was difficult for my armies to move in, and they had the advantage of being on the coast with the large and rich city of Jumne in the middle. They had no king and would never have accepted to be ruled by just one man. With them it was always the eldest who had the power."

"Isn't Jumne the town of Wolin?"

"I wouldn't know. It's not so easy to find your way in this strange future world of yours. In my time Jumne was just a jumble of small

wooden huts and narrow alleyways along the shore. It may well have been Wolin though. It is by the sea, on a largish island after all...

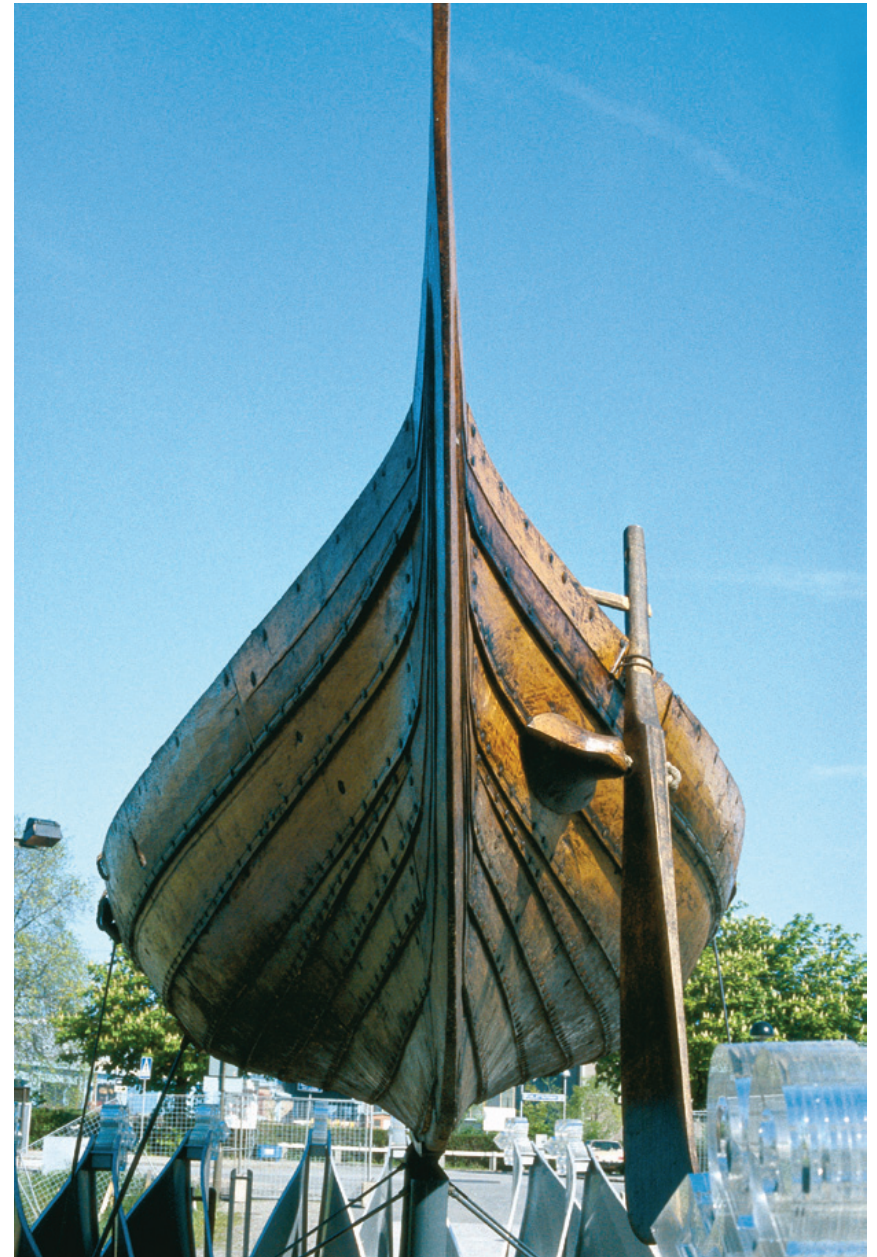
When the merchant Wulfstan sailed along the southern coast of the Baltic Sea in the 870s, he described the different countries he passed on his voyage. He set out from Hedeby, a large city on the border between Jutland and Germany and finished his journey in Truso, far to the east, sailing for seven days and seven nights. Wendland lay to his right, and the Danish islands Langeland, Lolland and Falster, and then Scania to his left. He couldn't see these lands of course, because they were too far off, but he knew they were there, and all belonged to Denmark. When he passed Bornholm he wrote – "this island has its own king."

Wulfstan's voyage went further eastward. Far in the north lay Blekinge and Öland, belonging to the Sweons. Finally he reached the mouth of river Wisla and the merchant town of Truso.

When I ask king Mieszko why Jumne (Wolin) is not mentioned by Wulfstan, he muses: "He must have passed it during the night ... it can't be that this large town didn't exist then, surely?"

In Wulfstan's time, Truso was a trading post on the Wisla estuary. The Elbing and Wisla rivers join here to form a large lake, the "Estmere", before both rivers pass into the Baltic Sea. This trading post was later to develop into the medieval city of Elbing. No significant archaeological finds have been made here, but traces of trading posts are not always so easy to find. The location on the Wisla estuary is excellent, however. The source of the Wisla lies far down in the south, close to the big Dnjestr river, which flows down to the Black Sea and mighty Constantinople, capital of the East Roman Empire. Thousands of merchants have of course made use of this waterway, both north- and southbound.

Mieszko shakes his head.



"Roar Ege", a replica of one of the many Viking ships found in Roskilde.

”Strange how in the future you go on about your Vikings making their way to Constantinople, or Miklagård as you call it, via the Russian rivers, when the shortest way is through Poland, via the two rivers, with the short stretch by cart in between. Why make it so difficult? After all, thousands of merchants took this route, through my realm.”

Here the old man is interrupted quite rudely by his great-granddaughter.

”My dear great-grandfather, don’t forget the Northmen had important interests in Russia along the Russian rivers. They even had a city, Novgorod, that was almost Nordic, and in Kiev there were scores of Northmen. I, myself, am one of them!”

The woman looks a little bit offended. And why indeed shouldn’t she be. She was after all once the Princess of Kiev.

”I didn’t mean to belittle you and your kin in faraway Russia,” says King Mieszko and laughs. ”But admit that there is a lot of talk of Northmen dragging ships between Russian rivers to get to the Black Sea. The southerners trading in Northern Poland avoided such hard work. They used my rivers. Take all the Greeks in Jumne, for instance.”

I feel the need to interrupt this duelling with words between the two relatives and manage to do so with a justified question: ”You mean to say there were Greeks in Jumne by the Baltic Sea?”

”There were people from all over the world in that town”, King Mieszko answers sullenly. ”Even people from the north-eastern Mediterranean lands had settled there. But because the Christians living there, even the Christian Northmen, followed the teachings of the church of the Eastern Roman Empire and not the Pope in Rome, we referred to them as Greek Christians.”

That Jumne was one of the more important towns around the

Baltic Sea a thousand years ago is evident, not least from the chronicles of the historian Adam of Bremen, who in 1070 wrote his four volumes on the lands surrounding this large sea. On Jumne he writes as follows:

”By the Oder estuary, where the river runs into the marshlands (later to form the Szczecin Lagoon), one finds the famous city of Jumne, a frequent anchorage for the pagan peoples and Christian Greeks that inhabit these lands. It is truly the greatest city in Europe, where Slavs, Greeks and pagan peoples live together. Even migrating Saxons are permitted to settle there on condition that they do not practise their Christianity, because of everyone else still being predominantly pagan, honouring various heathen customs and traditions. Despite this, the people are friendlier than in most places, and honest and hospitable. The city is rich in merchandise from all over the North; everything you could ever wish for is available there.

In Jumne you will also find the Brazier of Vulcan, or the Greek Fire, as it is known among the inhabitants. The God Neptune appears here in three guises; there are three waters around this island, one green, one white and one that rushes in constant stormy upheaval.”

One important question to the first ruler of Poland is burning my lips. Now I just have to let it out:

”In the future, a place much talked about is Jomsborg, a stronghold by the Baltic Sea, said to have been built by the Danes in the days of Harold Bluetooth. Do you know anything about this remarkable fortress?”

”The Danish king Harold Bluetooth certainly built many fortifications throughout his realm. He was also an ally of the Obotrites, who ruled the lands from present-day Lübeck almost all the way to Wolin. The Obotrites were friends of the Ūbâbas in Jumne, and King Harold could therefore have built a mighty

castle there too. Here they had a mighty fleet, and countless valiant warriors. You understand now why I could never defeat these impossible people?”

”Harold Bluetooth was also at war with King Eric the Victorious of the Sveons. Is that why you had your daughter marry him - to forge an alliance against the Danes?”

King Mieszko mutters impatiently and takes a large swig of the beer I have expediently poured him. Good, modern Swedish “light-beer” it is, but after the first gulp, King Mieszko gapes at the drink in disbelief.

”And what, I beg you, is this that you have given me? Tastes like piss, and looks like it too!”

The glass comes down on the table with a crash.

”Sire, you forgot my question...?”

At this point the woman at our table butts into the conversation. Her face bears the expression of a woman used to being in command. She views her ancestor with slight irony.

”Of course you did. At least that is what my father, King Olof (Skötkonung), told me.”

I turn to Ingegerd. Her long hair has been artistically arranged in a bun, her gaze is strong and proud and her voice rings out, accustomed as it is to issuing orders:

”In the realm of the Sveons, part of today’s Sweden, ruled my grandfather, King Eric. He later came to be known as “Eric the Victorious” because of the many battles he won against the Danes. The wars began around 980, when Eric’s relative Styrbjörn was forced to flee to Denmark, and he sought the aid of Harold Bluetooth. Harold sent a great fleet north, but the Danes were



The runestone by the old church in Sjörup.

defeated at the Battle of Fýrisvellir, near present-day Uppsala.

Later, after the death of Harold Bluetooth in the mid 980s, King Eric conquered parts of Denmark, and chased off Sweyn Forkbeard, Harold’s son. I assume you helped your son-in-law with that feat, King Mieszko?”

The Battle of Fýrisvellir, by Uppsala, north of present-day Stockholm, probably took place shortly after 980. Four Scanian runestones erected after the battle tell the story. The runes on one of these, by the church in Sjörup, read:

”Saxe erected this stone after Ásbjörn, his comrade-in-arms, son of Toke. He did not flee from Uppsala but fell while weapons he could wield”.

Incorporated in the walls of the church at Torna Hällestad, east of Lund, are three runestones that tell of people who took part in the battle:

”Áskel erected this stone after Toke, son of Gorm, his liege lord. He did not flee from Uppsala. Fighters closest to Toke, son of Gorm, set in memory of their brother the stone on the hill, strewn with runes.”

”Ásgaut erected this stone after Erra, his brother, who was in the ranks of Toke. Now stone shall stand on the mound.”

"Ásbjörn, of the ranks of Toke, erected this stone after his brother Toke."

Other sources mentioning this battle are considerably younger. The Icelandic monk Oddr Snorrason's "Olav Tryggvason Saga", written around A.D. 1190, claims Eric was victorious because he used witchcraft to defeat Styrbjörn's army. The "Knytlinga Saga", written on Iceland around 1260, gives a brief account, according to which Styrbjörn was married to Harold Bluetooth's daughter Tyra. The "Fletey Book", the medieval Icelandic manuscript from ca 1380, contains the most extensive account of the Battle of Fýrisvellir: "The God Odin struck Styrbjörn's army blind, whereupon Styrbjörn ordered his men to stick poles in the ground to hold on to, and not flee. There Styrbjörn fell with all his men and Eric stood victorious on the hills of Uppsala."

The manuscripts give rather fanciful accounts of what happened. The information the runestones offer, although brief, is rather more reliable. Who were they, then, these men who got their names inscribed in stone? Toke is mentioned as a lord (drott), and son of Gorm. He could well have been a brother of Harold, as Harold's father was the king Gorm.

I ask Mieszko whether he helped Eric the Victorious in his fight with Harold in Denmark, but he avoids answering the question directly, although he does not deny it either:

"By that time, Harold, who came from Jutland, western Denmark, had conquered all land that today is Denmark and Scania. This was made possible by his marriage to Tofva, daughter of the Obotrite king Mistivoj. The very same king I was at war with and whose lands I wanted for myself! Harold also had an important stronghold at mighty Jomsborg, right in the midst of my enemies."

"And as always you men use us innocent women to further your cunning plans, using marriage to gain control," says Ingegerd with a note of triumph in her voice.

She is right, of course. Not only in her observation of women forming important links in kinshipalliances, but also in how the political situation had developed in northern Europe towards the end of the 10th century. So I had to ask:

"Didn't you do the same thing, King Mieszko, at the beginning of your career? You married a mighty ruler's daughter to further your own cause, just like Harold did. But it came with a price, of course."

"What do you mean?"
King Mieszko looks at me, questioningly.

"Both you and Harold had to convert to Christianity to get to marry the right woman. And you got a mighty father-in-law in the bargain. And you did it only a few years apart too. Harold was baptised at the end of the 960s, wasn't he?"

King Mieszko does not answer, but I don't give up so easily.

"Harold's father-in-law, the Obotrite king Mistivoj, was a Christian and it would have been unthinkable for him to let a pagan marry his daughter. That's why Harold let himself be baptised. It is told that it was a German bishop



One of the runestones in Torna Hällestad.



This 12th century gilt plate from Tamdrup Church in Denmark is the oldest illustration of King Harold Bluetooth's baptism.

named Poppo who christened him. First Poppo demonstrated the power of the Christian God by putting an iron glove on his hand and holding it in a fire until it was red-hot, and then he pulled out his hand ...”

”... and it was completely unscathed.” King Mieszko laughs derisively. ”Some say he just picked up a glowing piece of iron. Yes, thank you, I know the story. The priest in question was called Poppo and the ceremony took place at Mistivoj’s court, but the rest is fiction. Harold just wanted to make it look like it was Christ that had guided him to the faith by not allowing the priest to be hurt, but in actual fact he was obliged to be baptised in order to take King Mistivoj’s daughter as his wife.”

”But when you married off your daughter Gunhilda to the Sweon king Eric, you didn’t force him to convert? He remained a pagan to his death. Why was that? ”

”To me political alliances were more important than religious ruminations. Besides, Gunhilda was allowed to practise her Christian faith freely, even as Queen of Sweonia, even though it lies much further north than Denmark and the pagan customs prevailed there for much longer than anywhere else in the Nordic countries.”

Ingegerd is now keen to join in again.

”My grandmother Gunhilda was a woman of strong will. Her husband, King Eric, was therefore wise enough to let her be. When she bore him an heir, who was to be my father, Olof Skötkonung, there was great family happiness.”

”It surprises me though, that she later got married again, to the Danish king Sweyn Forkbeard. Sweons and Danes weren’t that friendly in those days, were they?”

My question is based on the fact that when Eric the Victorious died in 995, Gunhilda remained a widow for some time, but then married Sweyn Forkbeard. She bore him two sons, one of whom later became Canute the Great, ruler of Denmark, England and Norway.

Ingegerd heaves a deep sigh.

”Again, it was a case of men forging alliances, using women as the prize. When Harold Bluetooth died, Eric the Victorious chased his son Sweyn Forkbeard off the Danish throne, and when Eric himself then died, a new alliance and friendship was forged between the two former enemies. From what I hear though, Gunhilda was not very pleased with her new husband. Shortly after bearing him two children, she took off with them to Poland, the land of her childhood.”

Adam of Bremen, in his writings from A.D. 1070, refers to a Polish princess, but never mentions her by name. Adam, who got his information straight from talks with the Danish king Sweyn Estridsson, states clearly, however, that she was the daughter of Mieszko I of Poland and that ”Sweyn Forkbeard married Eric’s widow, mother of Olof (Skötkonung).”

As this is the earliest, almost contemporary source, directly from a close relative (Sweyn Estridsson’s grandfather was Sweyn Forkbeard, Gunhilda’s second husband) it is very valuable compared to more recent, less factual sources. Another almost contemporary source on Gunhilda is Thietmar of Merseburg’s (A.D. 975-1018) chronicle on the Slavic peoples.

The problem with establishing Gunhilda’s history, however, is that later sources name one Sigrid the Haughty, daughter of a Sweon nobleman, Skoglar Toste, as the mother of Olof Skötkonung. Sigrid’s life’s story seems to be a myth though. She probably never even existed.

”But why was it so important for the Sweons and Danes to become friends? They had no common enemies.”

Ingegerd laughs contemptuously at my question. This is an extraordinary woman sitting here beside me. Her eyes are lively, but the whole of her being breathes aloofness and detachment. She

is certainly not a person who invites close friendship.

”But you forget the Norse. They played an important role in Nordic politics at that time. Olav Tryggvason had made himself king of Norway. He’d got to know Sweyn Forkbeard during a Viking raid in England, and with Sweyn’s help he’d managed to reach the coast of Norway in 995 and seize control of the country.

But then Sweyn Forkbeard’s sister created a bit of a disturbance. A mean woman, that Tyra! After Sweyn had made peace with the Sweons and got his old Danish realm back, he married off Tyra to your son Boleslaw I, to consolidate his power, didn’t he Mieszko? But Tyra was not a woman that you could easily control, and right after the wedding she ran off to Norway and married Olav Tryggvason instead.”

”I had no idea!” exclaims Mieszko. ”And how did my son react to this insult?”

”He wanted to be reconciled with the Norse king, so Olav sailed down to Poland with a great fleet. He became great friends with Boleslaw. This happened in 1000.”

”I was long dead then,” mutters Mieszko. ”It’s no wonder I knew nothing about this.”

It was as the Norse were sailing back from Poland that the great naval battle of Svolder ensued. It probably took place near the island of Ven, in the strait between Denmark and Sweden of today. Olav on his longship, Ormen Långe (the long Serpent) and his fleet engaged with a combined Dane-Sweon fleet. When Olav realised the battle was lost, he jumped overboard and disappeared forever into the waves.

”Please, why don’t we talk about something else than war? My lady Ingegerd, I would like to take this unique opportunity to hear more about your life as the daughter of a Sweon king”.

I was hoping Ingegerd would tell me about her childhood, but instead she starts talking about her father.

”My father Olof Skötkonung, came into power after the death of his father in 995. There was a woman called Edla, who had been taken captive during a raid on the Slavs, and my father took great pleasure in consorting with her.” Ingegerd frowned contemptuously. ”So great was his pleasure that she bore him two children, my half-siblings, Astrid and Emund. Shortly thereafter he married my mother Estrid, an Obotrite princess. Then my brother Anund Jakob came into this world, and then I was born in 1001.”

”I assume it was no coincidence that he chose an Obotrite princess. Your father Olof was an ally of Sweyn Forkbeard of the Danes. They didn’t like the king of Poland, who was friendly with the king of Norway. At the same time the Obotrite king and the king of Poland were at war with each other. By marrying an Obotrite princess, he forged a strong alliance against Poland and Norway. What scheming and conniving!”

”At least my mother was a Christian and we children were baptised as soon as we were born. Even my father decided to be baptised, but he had to do this in Husaby in Westrogothia (Västergötland), because of the pagan rule further north.”

”Ah, at the king’s own farmstead (kungsgård) at Husaby.” I just had to butt in to show off my knowledge of the subject. ”The priest who officiated was the English missionary Sigfrid. The well is still there to be seen. But why be baptised in that part of the country?”

”The province lay close to both Denmark and Norway, two countries converted to Christianity long before the godless Sweons up north in Uppland by the great lake Mälaren. Even though there was a big heathen temple in my father’s land in Westrogothia, as there was in Uppland, the Christian community in the west was much larger.”



Well at Husaby church in Westrogothia in Sweden, where, according to legend, Olof Skötkonung was baptised.

”And how did you get on with your siblings?”

”My father loved all his children. My mother, on the other hand, was not kind to my half-siblings Astrid och Emund. They always bore the brunt of her fits of anger. But my father didn’t make any difference between us, I had a good relationship with my father.”

I smiled, without trying to hide it, and Ingegerd mistook my smile for disrespect and looked at me angrily.

”Forgive me, my lady, but I can’t help wondering about the great love of your life and how your father thwarted your dreams. That wasn’t the act of a kind father, was it?”

Ingegerd reddens with indignation. After holding my gaze for a long while, she speaks:

”I suppose you’re referring to my betrothal to the Norse king Olaf Haraldsson the Holy. I think in retrospect, considering how my life turned out, my father was right to make me marry Yaroslav instead.”

After the great naval battle of Svolder in 1000, the victorious kings of Denmark and Sweden split Norway between them. Soon enough Olav appeared, a relative of one of the earlier Norse kings. He conquered all of Norway and thus came into conflict with the Sweon king Olof Skötkonung, who still maintained his claim to parts of it. The relationship between the two kings is described thus in a contemporary source:

”The Sweon king Olof had such a fierce hatred of his enemy Olav in Norway that no-one dared name him in the king’s presence. Instead, he was referred to as “the fat man.”

Earl Ragnvald of Westrogothia was called on to mediate. The idea was that Olav in Norway would marry Ingegerd, but Olof Skötkonung was infuriated by his daughter’s acceptance of the proposal.

”Yes, I must say, I’ve never seen my father so red in the face as then”, Ingegerd says, now that I mention it. ”I remember well the words he shouted at me in rage: ‘You want me to give up Norway and let you marry Olav, the fat man! That will never happen. Instead I’ll march on Norway and burn and lay everything to waste.’”

”But you opposed your father anyway, and promised the envoy that you would marry the fat man?”

”Olav wasn’t fat – he was nice and plump, just like a man should be.”

Perhaps Ingegerd is referring to me, tall and slim – obviously not the ideal physique for a Viking. Slightly embarrassed I carry on:

”But your opposition, my lady Ingegerd, it very nearly cost your father his life?”

”Yes, that’s right! Torgny the Lawspeaker brought up the issue of peace with Norway at the Thing of Uppsala, where he even threatened that the farmers would kill the king if he did not make peace with Norway. My father realised he had to succumb to their will, but he gave my half-sister Astrid to Olav instead, whilst arranging my marriage to Yaroslav of Kiev.”

”When did all this happen?”

”In the spring of 1019. Once the ice had thawed, I travelled with my entourage to the realm of Kiev, or Russia as you now call it. We called it Gardaríke. I was eighteen and this was my first long journey. I’d asked to have the town and earldom of Ladoga as a bridal gift, and I installed my faithful earl Ragnvald there to rule.”

This woman puzzles me. She certainly knows what she wants, is clearly accustomed to being obeyed, yet submissive when it comes to her marriage and choosing a husband.

“Why did you put up with it all?”

”That’s the way it was. When it came to safeguarding the continuity of bloodlines, it was the men who decided. We royal heirs were to have royal partners in bed, and those unions gave fruit. Blood is thicker than water after all.”

”You had many children then?”

”God blessed me and Yaroslav with seven sons and three daughters. Unfortunately they started fighting among each other after we had died.”

In A.D. 862, a delegation of Russians had asked the Northman Rurik and his brothers to govern the city Novgorod. The Northmen then expanded south along the rivers, down to the Black Sea. Twenty years later, Kiev became the capital of this realm. The rivers were important transport routes for the many Northmen who traded with the East Roman Empire and its capital Constantinople, Miklagård, as they called it. The Varangians or Varyags, were a mixed body of men, fierce but trustworthy, who served as mercenaries to kings and tradesmen along the route. They even formed the bodyguard of the East Roman Emperor. Yaroslav too, retained large units of these feared warriors. He often employed them in the many bloody fights he had with his brothers. One of them, Sviatopolk the Accursed, so named so because he had already murdered three of his brothers, was eventually killed by Yaroslav’s Varyag troops.

”Something you never knew during your lifetime though, was that you and your husband would eventually be canonized. How do you feel about that?”

Ingegerd frowns.

”My husband was rightly called Yaroslav the Wise. He founded many churches and abbeys and made sure that the Christian faith

became firmly established in Gardaríke. It feels a bit odd, to be a saint that people worship. Although they’ve changed my name to St. Anne, it’s still me. Every year on the 10th of February and the 4th of October people come to pray to me in all the churches in Russia. It was in fact Czar Ivan the Terrible, who in 1556 commanded that for ‘as long as the world stands’, mass shall be celebrated and requiems held in memory of me and my husband!”

”One last question, my lady Ingegerd. There has been much speculation on whether you were buried in the Saint Sofia Cathedral in Novgorod or the one in Kiev? There is an old stone sarcophagus in the Kiev cathedral containing the bones of a 65-70 year old man and a 50-55 year old woman. Could that be the worldly remains of yourself and your husband?”

Ingegerd gives me a big, but secretive smile.

”Now that’s an interesting question.”

This is as close as I get, the interview with these two historical personages has now come to an end.

Ása of Tullstorp and Sweyn Estridsen

It was difficult to choose the venue for my second historical meeting. I wanted a place that both of my thousand-year-old guests could relate to in a positive way. The beautiful Tullstorp runestone near the south coast of Scania would have been ideal from one point of view; this is where Ása had lived much her life as a chieftain's daughter and she was also one of those who had erected the stone. But out of doors ... and in a cemetery! I don't think my other guest, Sweyn Estridsson, king of Denmark would have been amused. And what if it rained?

After much deliberation I decided to place the two in what was once the Holy Cross Abbey, now the Old Church, in Dalby, just east of Lund. Not in the nave, there we would only be disturbed by the many visitors to this historical site. Instead, I have pulled up three chairs in the anteroom under the western tower, in the half-light between the stone pillars. I am sure my guests will feel comfortable here, although the room is not quite from their time, having been built in the early 12th century. A helpful churchwarden has also promised to keep curious visitors from interrupting my historical meeting.

”What a strange place, I've never seen anything like this before.”

It is the woman who speaks first. It's difficult to tell her age, she is probably close to fifty. She wears a long gown with shoulder straps, each fastened with an ornate clasp. A silver chain set with beautiful pearls connects the clasps. The dark blue of the fabric suggests a wealthy woman; the colour also matches her blonde hair beautifully. She seems slightly bothered, judging from the note of irritation in her voice. I sense I could have had a better start to my conversation, after all.

”I apologise if I've troubled you. I understand that you're not familiar with stone buildings. They weren't very common in Scania



The anteroom of the old church in Dalby is one of Scania's oldest preserved rooms.

in your time. You lived in the 10th century and it wasn't until the 11th century that they became more common here."

"Of course I know about stone buildings! Men returning from raids to the West or to the East Roman Emperor were always full of tales about great palaces and churches of stone. But such experiences were only for the men. We women stayed at home, but that didn't make us stupid!"

"What were your houses like, then? You're from the village of Tullstorp close to the Scanian coast, aren't you? Were there many buildings in the village?"

I try to appease the woman by changing the subject. It seems to work. Isn't the expression on her face softer now?

"We built our farms in small groups. Each farm consisted of a proper longhouse for living in, and one or more sheds and storage buildings. Because my father was a chieftain of the king, we also had a great hall for festivities and meetings. Sturdy wooden buildings they were, there was an abundance of good timber to be found in the large forests all around. Why have you cut all the forests all down? Fields everywhere you look! And where is all the game we used to hunt for food? Do you make do with just beef and pork? And where, oh where, are all the small lakes and beautiful meadows full of birds? You've converted my ancestral lands into barren fields!"

I choose not to answer all these hot-tempered questions. I could have told her that our 19th century farmers did it because they needed more arable to feed their starving children and that the forests in Scania, especially in the south, disappeared already a few hundred years after the woman's death. Instead, I bring the conversation round to a very large and flat stone.

"There is a runestone in the Tullstorp graveyard. It's one of the finest from the Danish Viking Age, and you were there when it was

raised. Please tell me about it. The short inscription doesn't give much information."

"Kleppe wanted it. Our brother Ulf had died in faraway Greece. He and Kleppe served the Emperor in Miklagård (Constantinople), in his Varangian Guard. Many of the sons of chieftains in south Scania did that. Mightiest of them was Gunne Hand, who lived a half-day's ride east of Tullstorp. They left one fine spring morning – Gunne and Kleppe came back, but not Ulf.

They went south across the Baltic Sea, through Poland down to the East Roman Emperor's great country. There they were fortunate enough to be able to show what fearless warriors they were. The Emperor had his own special guard, the 'Varangian Guard' made up only of Northmen, and Gunne Hand, a great man, had a special position in the guard. These were the only guards that the Emperor entrusted with his life."

"Perhaps they met Harold Bluetooth down there, when they were with the Varangians?

"You mean Harold, son of Gorm? I don't know... maybe. He must have been a respected person in the Guard, though, being the son of a Danish king. Why do you ask?"

"There is an old tale about Harold in his youth going 'East' as it was called when going to Constantinople via Russia. When he returned and became king of Denmark he took a great lion as his symbol, just like the Emperor. You think Harold might have got this idea from the Emperor?"

Ása doesn't answer immediately. You can see that she's sifting through her memories.

"Ah! You mean the Imperial Throne in Miklagård!" she exclaims at last. "Yes, that was a sovereign's symbol, if ever there was one. The Varangian captains stood guard on either side when the



This magnificent picture and runestone from the late 10th century is set in the Tullstorp churchyard in Scania.

Emperor received emissaries. Next to the throne were big metal lions that could move their tails, roar and spout steam from their muzzles. Kleppe had seen it with his own eyes and told us about it.”

Miklagård was the name the Northmen used for present-day Istanbul (Constantinople). Here stood the mighty East Roman Emperor’s palace. The Emperor would receive foreign emissaries according to protocol. The emissary was told to approach humbly, and at a prescribed distance fall to the floor and touch it with his forehead. There he had to remain until signalled to raise his head. Then he would see that the throne was now high in the air, lifted on pillars. One emissary wrote thus about the splendour of the throne:

”In front of the Emperor stood a tree of gilt bronze. Different birds, also of gilt bronze filled the tree and twittered just like live birds, each according to his beak. The Imperial Throne was constructed so that it could be made to look sometimes high, sometimes low. It was huge, built of bronze and wood. It was guarded by gilt lions that whipped the floor with their tails as they roared with open mouths and playing tongues.”

These mechanical monsters in the form of gilt lions were thus clearly the Emperor’s special symbols. During a reception they played a significant role with their roaring and their whipping of tails at certain points in the proceedings. Next to the lions stood the Varangian captains. This display of might must obviously have made an impact. Are these throne-guarding animals the inspiration for Harold’s lion image, “the great animal” that Harold Bluetooth and his inner circle of chieftains used?

”It could well be that young Harold was once of the Emperor’s guard and that’s where he got the idea to have this imposing animal as a symbol for a great ruler. ”

”True enough, Harold had an image of a lion carved on the runestone at Jelling, the stateliest stone in all of Denmark, by the king’s estate in Jutland, in the westernmost part of his realm. His mother and father were also buried at this estate. Many of his chieftains put the royal animal on their monuments too, as a sign of their loyalty to the king. The same reason for me and Kleppe to

have a lion put on our stone at Tullstorp.”

”My time is full of tall tales about Harold Bluetooth. Did you ever meet him?”

”Yes, I did in fact, once in the early 980s. On one special occasion too, the summer market in Halör, one of the largest in the North. He’d come there with his men to visit the earl who governed the area. The king got very angry during his visit and refused to let any of the merchants who’d gathered there leave, which, of course, caused them great concern. One man, Trond of Faroe, finally managed to placate the king, and soon thereafter Harold gave leave to break up that year’s market. I can assure you many merchants from afar left in a hurry.”

The market at Halör probably took place near Foteviken and Höllviken, in south-western Scania. It was always held at the beginning of the summer, unlike the more recent medieval fish market, which was held at Skanör and Falsterbo in the autumn, when the herring fishing was good. Halör had nothing to do with fish; it was chance for merchants and tradesmen from east and west to do business with each other.

The market at Halör is mentioned in three manuscripts. The Færeyinga Saga from the 12th century, for example, tells the following tale about Trond from the Faroes:

“In the summer Trond travelled south from Norway to Denmark and came to Halör. There was a great gathering of people there – when the market was on they say it drew the biggest gathering in the North. At this time, King Harold Gormsson Bluetooth ruled Denmark. This summer he had come to Halör with a great host of men.

Two of the king’s most trusted men had some valuables stolen from them and the king then ordered that no one was to leave the market before the thief had been found. Time passed and finally

Trond approached the king to suggest that every merchant should pay a little silver to the king for permission to leave the market. This produced far more silver than the stolen goods were worth; the king got a neat profit from it and Trond, who received a quarter of the silver, became the richest man on the Faroes. This gives a good indication of how many traders there were at the market in Halör.



A big lion with leaf-and-tendrill ornamentation can be seen on King Harold Bluetooth’s great runestone from the 960s in Jelling.



At the Foteviken museum near Höllviken, a whole Viking town has been built. The great Halör Viking market was held in this area.

That there was an earl in charge of Halör when the king was not there is clear from an episode from the 990s, in the Olav Tryggvason Saga: “The Norseman Halfred travelled at this time to Denmark and Halör, where he met Earl Sigvald, who was a great chieftain. Harold Bluetooth was then long dead.”

Ása has now become considerably more talkative. I thankfully let her carry on without interruption.

”King Harold came from Jutland and married a Slavic princess, Tofve, I think he called her. With the aid of his father-in-law he then conquered most of the lands that make up today’s Denmark. He came to Scania around 980, I can’t remember exactly when. Being a Christian, he pulled down the heathen temple in Uppåkra and built a ring fortress (trelleborg) close by on the other side of the stream running through the area. Outside the fortress perimeter, he built a wooden church consecrated to Saint Clement.” On that site now stands the city of Lund.

The elderly man at my side, who has hitherto remained quiet, now speaks to comment on the woman’s words. The journey a thousand years into the future has obviously been a taxing one as he starts with a big yawn.

”King Harold, my kinsman, built a ring fortress where you now have a town called Trelleborg as well,” he said. “Very aptly named, if I may say so.”

Sweyn Estridsson’s speech is not quick, almost a drawl.

”Yes, and another one further north, on the Öre Sound coast, at Borgeby and the trading post at Lödde. And we mustn’t forget the one at Helsingborg either. Outside all these he had wooden churches built to honour Saint Clement. One might suspect he was obsessed by this saint.”

”Any idea why he chose Clement as his patron saint?”

”Well, it might have had something to do with his travels east that you mentioned before. Towards the end of the 10th century the ruler in Kiev became Christian and a church was built there to the glory of Saint Clement. The saint’s head is allegedly kept there as a relic. If Harold was there he might have been inspired. Maybe, I don’t suppose anyone knows for certain.”

Pope Clement I was said to have died a martyr on Crimea in A.D. 101, and soon became the patron saint of the Slavic and Russian Christians. In Russia there are several churches devoted to Saint Clement. In Straja Ladoga, or Aldeigjuborg as the Northmen called this city, there was a church of Saint Clement right below the more recent medieval castle. According to a manuscript by Thietmar of Merseburg, Grand Prince Vladimir of Kiev was interred in 1015 in a sarcophagus in the nave of the Saint Clement church in Kiev, a city frequently visited by Northmen at that time. This church is probably the one known as the Church of the Tithes, which is known to have been built by the Grand Prince himself in 991-996. All Saint Clement churches in the

North are very early and it is most likely that this is associated with Harold Bluetooth's Christianisation of Denmark and southern Norway at the end of the 10th century.

"It amazes me that the Viking chieftain Harold Bluetooth managed to lay all of Denmark under him. Admittedly, he had garrisons in strategic places, but it's still remarkable that his descendants have managed to retain the throne, even down to the present queen of Denmark. How did he establish such control?"

Sweyn Estridsson, former king of Denmark looks at me incredulously.

"You mean to say that my family is still sitting on the throne of Denmark, after a thousand years? You must be joking!"

His voice is weak and ridiculously shrill, not quite that of a Viking champion. But he is surprised, all right.

"It's true, believe it or not. The Danish royal house is today one of the oldest in the world. The current queen is called Margrethe."

The man bursts out laughing.

"A woman on the throne? Now I know you're joking!" He stretches out his hand and takes a firm hold of my shirt. "I don't believe you. You should be very careful about lying in my company!"

"Stop that and let him go!"

Ása pulls the man's arm away from me and looks at him with anger.

"I've never heard of women ruling either, but it seems that strange things can happen in the future. What would you know, old man, of things that will come to be long after your time? Just take a look

around you, for instance. Not one candle in sight, yet there is light! How is that possible? Magic and witchcraft, if you ask me!"

I might have told the chieftain's daughter about electricity, low-energy light bulbs, electricity bills and lots of other modern things, but time is precious.

"So how did Harold stay in power? How did he manage to change society so profoundly?"

"Good organisation and yet more organisation!" Ása looks at me artfully. "King Harald had his 'trelleborgs' built primarily to support the enormous fleet he created. Without a strong fleet he couldn't have ruled Denmark – the whole country is made up of islands and straits. In Scania he had a large and secure winter harbour for his warships constructed at the Bay of Foteviken. Farmers were ordered to cart thousands of wagonloads of stone to make a barrier to protect the entrance to the bay.

But Harold needed soldiers too. He got these, and lots of silver, from his Obotrite father-in-law. Within his army, he created an elite force of loyal men who were close to him and whom he could trust. These men were given earldoms in the lands that had been laid under the Danish crown; all my brothers were the king's men. And then, you mustn't forget the Church ..."



Remains of one of Harold Bluetooth's ring castles (trelleborg) have been found in the town of Trelleborg on the south coast of Scania. It has been partially reconstructed.

Her voice falters, and she coughs and gasps for air. There's a well set in the stone floor behind me. I use a metal scoop to get her some water to drink. It's the church's old baptism well, and whether there are any holy powers left in its water I couldn't say, but she soon regains control of her voice.

"It's my lungs, you see. I died of tuberculosis like many in my days. Cold and damp living conditions made many of us weak and sickly long before old age could take its toll."

Archaeological excavations have shown that the public health in this period was not very good. In Lund there were once many more churches and cemeteries than there are today. Most churches were demolished in the 16th century, and the cemeteries fell into disuse. Many of these have been excavated, and examinations of the skeletons give us details of their age, gender, and possible injuries they may have suffered. The average life



Human skeletons from the Viking Age burial grounds in Tygelsjö south of Malmö show damage from hard toil.

expectancy of the population of Lund in the 11th and 12th centuries seems to have been just over 30.

Life expectancy was probably higher in the countryside. People there were not subjected to the polluted drinking water of the cities that undoubtedly contributed to the spreading of dysentery and other diseases. Excavations of the oldest cemetery at Tygelsjö, south of Malmö, revealed the remains of some of the first Christians from the years around 1000. Many of the skeletons bore evidence of a very hard life of heavy labour, disease and suffering.

Ása continues her story:

"Harold forced all the people in the lands he conquered to convert to Christianity, and each earl built a wooden church in the area he governed. This was very clever. Before, people had worshipped nature and the gods present there. Now they were allowed to pray to one God only, whose priests were ruled by the king, and the king was God's appointed ruler on Earth."

The woman frowns.

"That's the way to create control. If you control the religion, you control the world."

Ása's words give me food for thought. Harold must have got his ideas from somewhere. What was the source of his inspiration - his model - for the organisation, the carefully placed outposts, the fleets of ships, the cleverly designed ring fortresses with their symmetrically arranged longhouses, the religious connection ... ?"

"Did he get his inspiration from the East Roman Emperor? He had his power-base in the faithful Varangians, most of whom were Northmen."

"I wouldn't know anything about that. But the Varangians were

incorruptible elite warriors who would give their lives for the Emperor, there's no doubt about that. My brothers' friend Gunne Hand of Hunnestad in Scania was a captain of the Imperial Guard. They always led the stately processions in Miklagård, and what a grand sight they were. Each had an axe inset with silver on his right shoulder, and wore a long, silver-embossed azure tunic of embroidered silk. This was how Gunne Hand had himself depicted on the fine runestone in Hunnestad - a beautiful monument of coloured stones covered with runes and images that he and his sons set up. When Gunne Hand died, he was interred in a mound amidst the stones."

I don't have the heart to tell the woman the monument is no longer there. The stone with the image of Gunne Hand has been severely damaged and is today kept at the Museum of Cultural History in Lund.

One of Scania's absolutely finest monuments from the Viking Age is the one at Hunnestad, on the coast west of Ystad. The archaeologist Ole Worm explored the site in the 17th century and depicted the eight stones, which is how we know about the excellent craftsmanship of the carving. Five had pictures carved into them, two of these were also inscribed with runes and three were unmarked. At some point after 1716, the monument was destroyed in the wake of modernised agricultural practices. Then in 1814, Nils Henrik Sjöborg, a professor of history, found three of the stones set in a stonewall. One of them was the stone with the image of Gunne Hand, unfortunately broken into three pieces. The remaining Hunnestad stones were moved to the museum in Lund in 1913.

Now I want to return to the beautiful stone in Tullstorp, the one Ása was involved in setting up at the end of the 10th century.

"The longship that you had carved into the stone is large and beautiful. Was it your brother's? Did they build it here in Scania?"



Worm's etchings from the 17th century of the monument in Hunnestad west of Ystad.

Ása laughs heartily: "You fool! That's no ship of ours. Our ships didn't look like that at all."

"What do you mean? There are several runestones with ships like that on them. You say they're not Viking ships?"

I think my question well justified - we've always thought these images were of Viking ships.

"That's an Imperial warship. Can't you see the heavy rams both fore and aft? They were used to sink enemy ships. You'd row at high speed at another ship and ram them in the side. Our longships were too light for such tactics.

The Emperor had several different types of heavy warship in his huge fleet and it was because we Northerners were such good seamen that many became captains in the Imperial Fleet. Ulf and

Kleppe commanded such a heavy warship and that's why there is such a ship depicted on our stone in Tullstorp."

Yes, Ása was probably right. It's an easy mistake to make, thinking the Varangians were only engaged in the Emperor's bodyguard. The East Roman Empire was, after all, built on a strong naval force. Logically the seasoned seafarers of the North would have been very useful in the Imperial Fleet too.

Towards the end of the 8th century, the East Roman rulers successively began to regain their control of the Mediterranean Sea. Naval warfare tactics developed and the "dromon" warships, bows and sterns decorated with figures of wild animals, and with rows of round shields along the sides, became a symbol of the East Roman Empire's increasing power. The dromons, with their multiple banks of oars, were fast and manoeuvrable, had rams fore and aft, and often carried weapons such as 'Greek fire', a kind of flamethrower, and catapults.

There were three types of dromons. The smallest, the "ousiakoi" with a crew of 100, was a two-banked galley with the lower rank rowing only, and the upper rank rowing or disengaging to fight when required. The slightly larger "pamphylos" had a crew of 120 to 160 men. The third type was the "dromon" proper, with a crew of 200 men, 50 on the lower bank, 100 on the upper bank, and 50 marines.

We know about the dromons from old manuscripts, and images of them appear on many runestones in Denmark and Sweden.

"So, you're a relative of Harold Bluetooth?"

Ása turns to the old man now slumped on the chair beside her. He seems to have nodded off, but wakes with a start, pulling himself upright with a distracted grunt. Presently Sweyn Estridsson is all with us again.



Viking warships were light, slender and fast, and had a shallow draught, in contrast to the clumsy ships of the East Roman Emperor.

"That's correct. He was my grandfather's father. Truly a man to revere. My mother always held him in very high esteem"

Ása shakes her head and gently pats the old man's arm.

"Well, he wasn't that remarkable actually. A big egoist he was, or small rather, and a bit plump, at least that's how he looked in his old age."

Sweyn Estridsson pushes her hand away and stands up so sharply that his chair falls over behind him. The woman takes no heed but continues with her derogatory comments on Sweyn's ancestor.

"He came to a bad end, too. He was waging war against his son Sweyn Forkbeard. One of Forkbeard's men, the archer Palnetoke, came upon him in the woods when he was answering a call of nature, and shot at him. An arrow in Harold's naked behind took his life! Not a very heroic way to go, what?"

Sweyn is sorely angered to hear such slander. He rushes to the door in a rage and yanks the handle to get out. My helpful churchwarden has locked the door, however, to prevent us from being disturbed. Sweyn tugs violently at it, but to no avail.

"My good lady, I am not accustomed to such disrespectful behaviour!" he calls out, shaking his fist at Ása. "Call the key-bearer immediately, I wish to leave!"

I get up to intervene.

"I'm afraid that's not possible. The churchwarden has gone to have lunch and won't be back for a while. Let's try and make the best of this situation. Please, sire, won't you let me ask you something?"

Sweyn huffs in disgust, but after a while I manage to reconcile the two, and the king of Denmark agrees to sit down again. He does, however, place his chair by the well, as far away from the Tullstorp woman as possible.

"Your childhood must have been a very exciting one, sire, your mother being of royal blood. Why don't you tell us a little bit about it?"

"Exciting? Yes, definitely. You wouldn't believe some of it. My uncle was not quite right in the head. A real brute! My grandfather was mad too. And they were supposed to be kings of Denmark!"

"But your grandfather Sweyn Forkbeard died in 1014, before you were born?"

"True, but my mother Estrid told me about her father. Four children they were: Harold, Canute (the Great), my mother and her sister Santslaue. When my grandfather had murdered his own father, Harold Bluetooth, in 986, I think it was, he tried to grab the crown of Denmark for himself. But the Sweon king, Eric the Victorious came with a great fleet and chased him off to the west where he plagued England, among other countries, for years to come. A number of Viking chieftains had gathered there, most notably my mother's father Olav, who was later to become king of Norway, and was canonised Saint Olav after his death in 1030.

The English were stupid. To be spared being pillaged by the Vikings, they paid them large amounts of silver, only to have them return for more after a few years. It just went on, my grandfather being the greedy type."

The English king paid enormous sums in silver to the Viking hordes. One of the best sources for understanding the political circumstances of the time is the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which states for the year 991: "For the first time it was decided that taxes would be levied to buy off the Danish invaders." (The 'Danegeld' payments began in 991 and continued at intervals until 1016.) The amount of silver paid that year is estimated to have weighed 4 tons. But there was more to come. In 994, it was 6 tons, in 1002 it was 9 tons, and by 1007 the sum had risen to a staggering 30 tons.

The silver was distributed among the Vikings who took part in the raids. Many of the treasures that have been found buried in several places in Denmark come from the Danegeld. One of Sweden's largest Viking Age treasures was found in 1924, in Igelösa, near Lund. It consists of 2,057 silver coins minted between 865 and 1005. The treasure was probably buried there shortly after the minting of the youngest coins. This and many other treasures are now kept in the Cultural Heritage Bank of the Lund University Historical Museum.

I am quite awestruck sitting in the Old Church here in Dalby with one of Denmark's great Viking Age kings. I have so many questions ... what to ask next? But King Sweyn beats me to it:

"In 1013, my grandfather, Sweyn Forkbeard, gathered a mighty fleet and sailed England. This time silver was not enough - now he wanted it all, the whole realm. After a number of battles he



Some of the Viking Age silver coins from the great treasure found at Igelösa, north of Lund. The Historical Museum in Lund.

stood victorious, ruler of the country. But he was not to enjoy his conquest for very long. The year after, in 1014, he died of a heart attack in the middle of a good friend's wedding party.

My uncles Harold and Canute split the inheritance, Harold taking Denmark and Canute England. But uncle Harold died after four years, so Canute became king of Denmark too."

"We know all that from our history books," I interrupt. "Soon Canute started waging war on both the Norse and the Sweon kings, and had to come over from England with a great fleet. The final battle was fought in Scania by the Helgeå river. Is this when Canute accused your father of cowardice?"

I feared Sweyn Estridsson would be angry again, now in defence of his father, the earl Ulf, but this time he just looks sadly at me.

"You know, I was only a small child in 1025, at the time of the battle. Both Sweons and Norwegians fled, but I don't really know what happened. My mother would never speak about it; misfortune haunted us for a long time after."

"You're thinking of what happened after the battle, when your father and the king met in Roskilde on Zealand?"

"Yes, my mother woke me up in the middle of the night, put me on a horse and then we rode off together with some riders. We got on a ship and fled to the Sweon king Anund Jacob.

Later I learned that my uncle King Canute and my father had fallen out while we were in Roskilde. Some said that Canute had my father killed in the middle of a banquet. To honour the memory of my father, my mother donated silver to have the wooden church of Saint Clement in Roskilde replaced with one of stone."

"How long were you in exile at the court of the Sweon king?"

”Twelve years. Long enough for me to become a man and take off to England and Franconia with ships of my own.”

At the death of Canute the Great, his realm was split between his sons, Harthacnut becoming Cnut III of Denmark and Harold Harefoot regent in England. Both died soon after, upon which the Norse king Magnus I, managed to lay also Denmark under his reign. Sweyn Estridsson, however, was by then old enough to lay a claim to the Danish throne after his grandfather. He was defeated by Magnus and forced to swear fealty to him. This ‘friendship’ did not last long, of course, and bitter feuding over the Danish throne ensued. Denmark fell into a period of disorder and it was not until Magnus’ death in 1047 that Sweyn Estridsson could be unanimously elected king of Denmark. The fighting with the Norse, however, continued for many years to come.

”You suffered a grim loss at the naval battle of Nissan, on the coast of Halland, in the Bay of Laholm. Would you care to comment on that?”

”I had assembled a great fleet in Harold Bluetooth’s winter harbour at Laholm, in the north of the Öre Sound. We knew that Harold of Norway was sailing south and when we heard that he was approaching, we struck out into the bay to stop him from advancing. We tied our ships together to form a floating bridge to fight from. I did this because their numbers were far greater than ours, thinking it would give us a better chance of victory.”

The king stops talking, obviously bent on trying to remember details from the battle.

”My men fought well, but the situation was hopeless really. Night fell but the fighting continued. Under the cover of darkness, many of my captains untied their ships and fled. Further fighting after that was futile and we sailed off.

With more men I would have won that battle easily. There was

nothing wrong with their courage; take Aslak for instance, one of my oarsmen. In a fit of battle-rage he ripped off all his clothes and leaped stark naked onto an enemy vessel and cleared everybody off with a cudgel. A champion like him had never been seen before.”

”Your life’s story certainly is remarkable. Growing up exiled in a strange land, then successfully pillaging Europe as a Viking chieftain, then King of Denmark, but always forced to fight bloody battles to keep your realm and mostly losing! What a hard fate! Why was this so?”

”You’re exaggerating my friend,” says the King peering at me. ”True enough, I suffered some hard times, but I never lost that many battles, did I?”

Anxious not to annoy Sweyn Estridsson again, I refrain from pressing this obviously sensitive point. The defeats against the Norse were nevertheless many and in 1045 he had to seek refuge again with the Sweon king. It was not until 1064 that Sweyn could achieve lasting peace with the Norse king.

”We’re now sitting in the Old Church of Dalby, near the Viking city of Lund. Even if its oldest parts were not built in your time, you’re no doubt familiar with the site?”

”Of course! This is where Harold Bluetooth had an estate built for himself and a small wooden church, already at the end of the 10th century. I started the building of the stone church when I appointed Egino bishop of Dalby in 1060.”

Building of the oldest stone church in Dalby began in 1060, when Sweyn Estridsson had appointed Egino bishop. It was formerly assumed that the nave of the present-day church was a remnant of this first stone church, but recent excavations of the church floor show that there was another, older church on this site. So the present church was probably built in 1080, at the same time as the building of the cathedral in Lund started.

In about 1100, the second stone church was complemented with the big West tower, with its large vaulted anteroom. From the farmstead (kungsgård) main longhouse, right by the West tower, the king could pass straight to the tower's upper floor via a wooden walkway, and from there observe mass being celebrated in the church. The farmstead was later given to Augustinian monks who converted it to what was once one of Sweden's oldest monasteries. Today there are only some remnants of the monastery walls north of the church.

”One thing puzzles historians of my time. Why did you have two dioceses set up so close to one another? One in Lund and this one in Dalby, only a few kilometres apart?”

”Why's that puzzling? What's the problem? In the year 1060, I set up ten dioceses in Denmark. I installed the English bishop Henry in Lund, and the German bishop Egino in Dalby. Egino was given Dalby as security, because he'd been a missionary bishop. He'd been to Blekinge, and converted the whole province to Christianity, thus bringing it under the crown of Denmark. Blekinge used to belong to the Sweons. He went north to Westrogothia pulling down heathen temples, and to Sigtuna, with plans even to burn the infamous heathen temple in Uppsala.”

”So by setting up ten dioceses in Denmark you laid the foundation for a Christian organisation for all of Denmark. But would you consider yourself to be a deeply religious Christian king?”

The laughter this question provokes is probably the loudest ever heard in the stone hall of this church. Tears appear in Sweyn Estridsson's eyes as he laughs out loud.

”Religious! You believe in fairytales too? Power is the key element. Power, power and more power. My friend, Archbishop Adalbert of Hamburg-Bremen, was an extremely ambitious man. He was long regarded to wield more political power than the German Emperor. He had a dream that he cherished in secret. Do



The church in Dalby, east of Lund, is one of Scandinavia's oldest preserved stone churches.

you want to know what it was?”

My silence is taken as a yes:

”He wanted to become as powerful as the Pope. If he couldn't be Pope himself, then he could become Patriarch of Europe, the Pope's representative in Northern Europe. To do that, he needed to have at least twelve dioceses under his control, one of which had to be a missionary diocese set up to spread the Holy Gospel to heathens in a heathen land. He had two dioceses of his own in Germany... Now perhaps you understand why I set up ten in Denmark and made Egino a missionary bishop!”

”And what was in it for you then?”

”Archbishop Adalbert of Hamburg-Bremen had been given supremacy over the Scandinavian peninsula, but I wanted an

Archdiocese of the North, governed from Lund. I had one problem though; an Archdiocese must have many churches. Therefore I had wooden churches built all over Lund. And fast too. Soon there was a church in every quarter in the city.”

Due to the favourable archaeological conditions in the soils of Lund, many wooden structures from the Viking Ages have been preserved. Several wooden churches have been excavated and their foundations have been found to be remarkably well preserved. Using dendrochronological methods (tree-ring dating) it has been possible to accurately pinpoint the year the timber was felled. At least eight churches have been dated in this way. Strangely enough, all of them seem to have been built around 1050.

The wooden churches found in Lund were all so-called stave churches. Sturdy poles (staves) set into the ground bear the frames and roof. The walls were made of split logs set together with the lower end stuck in the ground, and the upper end fastened to lintels resting on the staves.

”I realise now why you made an Englishman, Henry, the bishop of Lund. The Norse had contact only with the church in England so they’d find it easier to accept the Patriarch if the bishop in Lund was an Englishman?”

Sweyn Estridsson chooses not to answer this question. With a cunning glint in his eyes he speaks again:

”Choosing Henry was not a success, unfortunately. People thought him unsuitable. He was drunk all the time and ate too much. But God steers his servants; one day Henry ate so much that he choked on his own vomit and Egino became the new bishop of Lund.

At that time, around 1060, Adalbert sent a priest to me, Adam of Bremen. He’d come to collect material for a book on the heathens and the life and works of Adalbert. The book was to be sent to



The city of Lund in Scania was founded during the end of the 10th century. Excavations have unearthed remains of several wooden churches. Here are the outer walls and the inner wooden staves of one of them.

the Pope in support of Adalbert’s claim that he should be made Patriarch.” I am shocked. Where in the life of Jesus did they find support for such ruthless power games? Is this all they cared about in the olden days? To use religion to gain political influence?

”But ... Adalbert criticised you too for your many affairs and illegitimate children.”

”He had no cause to criticise me. I was no man of the Church. True enough he did go on, ranting and raving over my mistresses and their children by me, but I was not sworn to celibacy. I had no need to deny myself the joys of a woman’s embrace.”

”It may interest you to know that one after the other, all your illegitimate sons became Kings of Denmark.”

The man looks at me in surprise.

”All of them? Did they kill each other?”

”Harold, also known as Hein, died of illness in Dalby around 1080 and is in fact interred in this church. Knut, later known as Canute the Holy, was killed by rebelling peasants in a church in Odense on Fyn and then canonised. Olav then followed as Olav I of Denmark; his reign was plagued by crop failure and famine, thus making him known also as Olav Hunger. When he died, your second son Eric Evergood took the throne, but he died on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1103. After that, your youngest son Niels ruled Demark for 30 years.”

Sweyn Estridsson looks pleased. Few kings have had the satisfaction of so many sons succeeding the same throne. There’s one last question I need to ask, about a seemingly trivial issue of six stones:

”When at last you made peace with the Norse, in 1064, it seems to me it would have made sense to make peace with the Sweons too. Are you the ‘Sweyn, King of Danes’ who had six stones set to mark the border between Denmark and Sweonia?

”Of course! If with Adalbert’s help I was to have an Archdiocese of the North, ruled from Lund, I could hardly be seen to be having

internal troubles, could I? We, that is the Sweon king, Emund the Evil, (Emund the Old), and I, therefore chose six men each to mark the border by setting up stones on the main roads through the great forests between Denmark and Sweonia. We set up six stones in all. Why do you ask?”

”Some people of my time think it was your grandfather, Sweyn Forkbeard, who did this.”

Before Sweyn Estridsson has a chance to say anything else, there is a sharp knock on the door. The churchwarden unlocks the door, wanting to show one of Scania’s best-preserved medieval rooms to a busload of tourists. When I turn around, all that is left of my historical encounter is three empty chairs. My guests from the past have disappeared.



Picture of a small Viking ship. The Historical Museum in Lund.

Sigurd Kappe and Emund

Finding a suitable place for my last historical encounter was fairly easy. It had to be on Bornholm, the famed island in the Baltic Sea between Scania and Poland. I'd found three good venues, all with a long enough history: Hammershus castle, Lilleborg and the church at Osterlars. I chose the church, mainly because the other two are mere ruins, offering no shelter. It's certainly nicer to be indoors, in a heated room.

Like the church in Dalby, Osterlars has an understanding warden. We are allowed to use the church's gallery, accessed only via a very narrow staircase inside the church's stonewall.

"Welcome to Osterlars church. It should be familiar to you, Emund - you helped to build it, after all, at the end of the 12th century. For you though, Sigurd Kappe, it must feel quite strange. I noticed your puzzlement when you were squeezing up the narrow stairs."

I turn to the man looking out through one of the many arrow slits in the outer wall. He turns to face us.

"Yes, it's a strange building indeed. A church, you say? But it's round! We saw several churches like this on the way here ... all built of stone too. Remarkable. In my time it was different. There were only a few very small wooden churches on the whole of island Borgundarhólmr, as we called it then."

"That's an unusual name for the island; I've seen it called Holm or Bornholm in old manuscripts, but rarely come across the name Borgundarhólmr."

"I don't really know very much about that. True enough it has been called by many names; both Holm and Bornholm could be shorter versions of Borgundarhólmr, I suppose. Someone said it could have something to do with a woman, Burgund being a woman's

name. Others said it simply meant the island with a castle (borg). But however much you may wish it, you'll probably never find out for sure."

"Tell me about yourself, please. When and where does your history begin? At some point towards the end of the 10th century, I believe. But what is your relation to Bornholm?"

The man sits down with great difficulty. He is old and is obviously suffering from gout. His back seems to be hurting as well, as he tries to make himself comfortable in the chair, without any real success. The chair is one designed by Arne Jacobsen, the famous Danish furniture designer, but that doesn't seem to help.

"To understand my story, you have to start with my parents; my father Vesete was an earl under King Haloge of Hálogaland, a small kingdom in Northern Norway. This king had a daughter, Eisa, whom my father asked permission to marry, but he refused. So my mother and father eloped to live on Bornholm. My grandfather declared them outlaws and so they could never go back to Norway. It's even said that he employed witchcraft to stop them from returning. My parents had two children, Bue and me, Sigurd."

The oldest accounts of Bornholm are from around A.D. 870, in the tale Wulfstan told to King Alfred of England. Bornholm, or rather "Burgenda land" as he calls it, then belonged to the Danes, but had a king of its own. Sigurd Kappe's account is fully supported by the description of his family in an old Icelandic manuscript, "The Saga of Thorstein, Viking's Son".

"You and your brother Bue became real Vikings, didn't you - in the sense of the word as many use it today - fierce warriors on board big warships."

"What makes you think that?" Sigurd Kappe asks with surprise. "Do I look like a fierce warrior? I can hardly walk. You just saw me struggle up the steps of this odd church."



The church at Österlars is the largest of the four round medieval churches on Bornholm.

"Old writings tell your story. You had a long life and you're not the only one to be struck by illness in your old age. I would very much like to hear some stories from your heyday. How, for example, did you get Strut-Harald's daughter Tove into your bed?"

"No simple feat that, I can assure you! My father fell out with the Danish earl Strut-Harald. One night his sons came over to Bornholm and plundered some of my father's prosperous farms. My brother and I decided to take revenge and sailed out with three ships and well over two hundred men. We plundered and burned down the three biggest of Strut-Harald's farms. We found not only two chests full of gold but also Strut-Harald's most cherished possession, his gold-pointed (strut) helmet. Then we came back home."

"It doesn't seem like the best way to get someone's daughter for a wife. To rob her father, I mean?"

"If it hadn't been for my father, there wouldn't have been a marriage at all, that's for sure. He went to King Sweyn Forkbeard and threatened to start a civil war in Denmark unless he mediated. And so it was decided that we should return the helmet, but could keep the chests of gold. In addition, Sweyn Forkbeard decided that I should take Tove, Strut-Harald's daughter, as my wife."

"And so you lived a picture of family happiness here on Bornholm. But you didn't stay on the island for very long, did you? You soon went off again."

"Yes! Those were the days! Me and Bue sailed with many ships and men down to Jomsborg, in what you now call Poland, where we were accepted as Jomsvikings."

"Yes, I've heard about Jomsborg from talks with other people. A mighty fortress it was, with formidable fighters, feared by all. But you were tricked there weren't you?"

"Too true!" exclaims the man sitting on the Danish designer chair. "King Sweyn wanted battle with the Norwegian king, but without us knowing, he plotted to get rid of us Jomsvikings as well. He invited everyone to a banquet and got us all drunk, and while drunk, we promised to sail to Norway and kill their earl. I myself vowed to go along and keep fighting for as long as my brother lived."

"An ill-fated promise, as it turned out."

"Well, in the year 986 we had gathered a big fleet and met the enemy by Hjörungavágr in Norway. The earl Haakon Sigurdsson had gathered all the ships in all of Norway and the battle was long and hard. After much fighting, earl Haakon withdrew and we thought he'd given up. But he returned with magic powers! He'd sacrificed his seven-year-old son Erling to a troll, Torgerd Hordetroll, and against such a force we were powerless. My brother Bue died there."

The old manuscript "The Jómsvíkinga Saga" tells of what happened to Sigurd Kappe and his brother in the battle:

"And at the same moment that Sigvald manages to get his ship free of the raft, Torkel Midlang leaps over from his ship to Bue's ship, and attacks Bue. This happens very suddenly. He hews his lips and chin clean off, scattering his teeth across the deck.

Wounded like this Bue said: "Now the Danish girl back home on Bornholm will be less keen to kiss me" and struck back at Torkel. But the deck was slippery from all the blood, so that when Torkel tried to dodge the blow he fell and was hit full on, cleaved in two by Bue. Then Bue seized his gold chests, one in each hand, and jumped overboard. And neither he nor the chests were ever seen again."

"Do you want to hear what the author of "The Jómsvíkinga Saga" has to say about you at the end of the tale?"

Sigurd Kappe looks interested, but says nothing, so I go on reading:

”Sigurd Kappe, brother of Bue, went home to Denmark to claim his heritage after Vesete on Bornholm. There he lived on for many years and was considered to be a successful man. Many people can trace their ancestry back to him and his wife Tove, their marriage being a good one after his return.”

”It’s true that Tove, despite being the daughter of that conceited Strut-Harald, was a good woman. If only she hadn’t got so besotted with the teachings of the White Christ and all the ramblings his priests wanted us to believe. It left its mark on our family life, I can tell you.”

It was as if the old man had read my mind. I’d made a note on my pad about things I’d wanted to ask him, and ‘Paganism and Christianity’ was top of the list. I immediately picked up his thread and switched from war to religion.

”I know that Harold Bluetooth introduced Christianity to Denmark in the 970s. Did he come here to Bornholm as well?

”Of course! Bornholm was a place of strategic importance, right in the middle between the country of the Slavs and Scania. It was always an essential place to control, so this Danish conquering king from Jutland came with his ships and men and had retainers settle on the northern part of the island. He also had a church built there,



This impressive monument was erected in Hjørungavåg, in Norway, to commemorate the great naval battle in 986.

in honour of Saint Clement. Soon after though, his son, Sweyn Forkbeard, murdered him and the worshipping of Christ became less popular. That’s why it took such a long time for the priests to destroy all of our holy places of old on the island.”

”Archaeologists have unearthed something they think was one such holy place, called ‘Sorte Muld’. Do you know anything about it?”

Sigurd Kappe has, of course, never heard of the place. What to do now? The name is probably a recent one, reflecting the present day colour of the soil (sort = black), being blackened by layer upon layer of cultural history over the ages. I spread my map on the table and point at its location, but that doesn’t help at all at first, of course - the man has never seen a map before! The concept is not so easy to explain, but finally the old Viking understands and puts a grimy finger on the map.

”There! Yes, that looks about right. That’s the site of one of the finest temples on Bornholm, before the white priests came. The temple itself was not very big, but it had a high tower. Inside it were wooden statues of the more important gods, Odin and Freya. When they dug around here they must have found lots of the sacrificial gold?”

”You mean those small pieces of gold foil with incised figures?”

”Exactly! I’ve been told they were sold in great quantities to cover the temple walls with as gifts to the gods. But that was long before my time, I’ve never seen any such sacrificial gold myself, only heard tales about it.”

The finds of Sorte Muld in the 1970s caused a sensation. Metal detectors were used in the excavations and scores of these small gold foils were found in the black soil. Although only small, about 1-2 centimetres in size, they had many different motifs on them, sometimes a person, or a couple of people, sometimes an animal. The astonished archaeologists recovered more than two

thousand such foils. They date mostly from the 8th century.

The modern term for these foils is 'guldgubbar' or 'old men of gold'. The term is derived from the tales of a Swede, who on his travels in 18th century passed Ravlunda, on the east coast of Scania. There he met some farmers who claimed they often found tiny plates of gold in the sand, which they called 'guldgubbar'. Their use is not clear. It's reasonable to assume from their location that they were used in some sort of cult. Too thin to serve as currency, they were more probably offerings of some sort, possibly fastened to temple walls as gifts to the gods.

The answer to my next question, whether there were more temples like this in Denmark, is exhaustive:

"Naturally. Our God before Christianity came along was Nature and the gods who ruled over its forces. Every farmstead had its own little shrine where offerings were made to ensure happiness and prosperity. There were the holy groves, and some solitary trees were attributed divine powers. And we had our temples. One particularly remarkable one was the one located on Zealand by Lejre. Every ninth year, 99 people were offered to the gods, together with as many horses, dogs and cockerels. After all, Lejre was the King's seat of old, with many magnificent halls.

I know of two famous temples in Scania, one in Uppåkra near the Öre Sound and one by Ravlunda. And then there was, of course, the great Slavic temple Arkona on Rügen, with the big wooden statue of Svantevit, the four-faced god."

"How did you worship your gods?"

"We celebrated blót several times a year. Farmers gathered by the temple, the holy place, each bringing beer, mead and animals. The animals were slaughtered and the blood, which was considered to have special powers, was sprinkled on the statues of the gods, on the walls of the temple and on the participants themselves. The



"Guldgubbar" from Sorte Muld on Bornholm. Photo: Martin Stoltze.



Reconstruction of the temple by Uppåkra in Scania based on archaeological finds.

meat was cooked and served at the grand feast of the blót.”

The man falls silent, obviously lost in pleasant reveries.

”Lots of mead and beer, you know. Many toasts to be drunk. They were the so-called memories. First a toast to Odin and success in war, then to Freya for a bountiful harvest. Finally, a toast to the memories of our ancestors.”

Around 1070, Adam of Bremen wrote about another heathen temple, on Slavic territory, near present-day Berlin. This is where the Redarians or Veleti lived in Viking times: “Their renowned major stronghold, Rethra is a centre for heathen worship”, writes Adam. “A great temple has been built here for their pagan gods, Radegast the foremost among them. His statue is of gold and rests on a purple mantle. The stronghold has nine gates, and is surrounded on all sides by a deep lake. A wooden bridge leads across, over which only those bringing offerings or those seeking an answer from the Oracle are allowed to pass.” This temple was destroyed as late as 1128 by the Saxon duke Lothar of Supplingen, though regrettably we have no other account of it than that given by Adam.

The Danish author Saxo described the temple at Arkona on the north point of Rügen at the end of the 12th century. Bishop Absalon of Roskilde destroyed this holy place on his crusade in 1169. Saxo, whose Danish history was commissioned by Absalon, writes:

”In the middle of the city is an open space with a mighty temple. Built of wood, the temple is held in high esteem, not only because of its splendour, but also because of the idol statue that stands there. The exterior was decorated with exquisitely carved images and reliefs, which were, however, clumsily painted. There was only one door to the temple. Inside, the temple was divided into two sections, one outer section around the perimeter with a red ceiling, and one inner section resting on four pillars. Save for a few beams and the roof, the inner section had no parts in common with the outer.”

Some pagan rites were also observed in special places in the open. One such holy place was Chelmska hill near Koszalin. With its 137 metres above sea level, it is the highest point in Pomerania and was probably the site of a regional pagan centre. After Pomerania was converted to Christianity, a church to the honour of Virgin Mary was built on its peak.



Large parts of the temple area at Arkona on Rügen have fallen into the sea. The earthworks marking its perimeter can be seen here.

All the while I've been talking to Sigurd Kappe, the man beside me has stayed awkwardly quiet. It is slightly unsettling; does he find the company trying? Doesn't he like the place I've chosen? Maybe he objects to sitting in the church gallery ... I could understand that, seeing as how he helped build the church a long time ago. Up here it's more castle than church; the walls are raw, medieval stonewalls, there are rough wooden hatches and arrow slits. Down in the church proper, it is neat and tidy, and the walls are decorated with colourful fresco paintings. I try to involve him in the conversation:

"What, would you say, were the most important events of your life?"

The man clears his throat, but his answer is not very enlightening:

"Well, my father was a very wealthy chieftain owning lots of land here on Bornholm, so I suppose one could say my childhood was very different to that of most people on the island. Normally everyone, both farmers and thralls, had to work hard in the fields. There were thralls who'd been taken as prisoners of war and sold, but there were also those who'd chosen to enter into thralldom in order to survive. At least as a thrall you had somewhere to sleep, and you were given food, clothes and protection. You mustn't forget that these were dangerous times. There was law and order to some extent, but often it was your sword and the number of men you could gather behind you that was your greatest protection.

The Danish king had great interests in this relatively small island. In my time there were twelve royal farmsteads (kungsgårdar) on the island and a royal castle, Lilleborg. The Church was also a power to be reckoned with. Hammershus on the northern tip of the island was the seat of none lesser than the Receiver and Bailiff of the Archbishop of Lund. Of Bornholm's four hundreds, the Church owned three. You can appreciate that there was plenty of food for strife among the Lords of the island."

"What you say now ties in very well with an old tale called Knýtlinga Saga. According to the saga there were 14 churches on the island, a lot for such a small piece of land!"

"Don't forget that this is a rich island! Many merchant ships come and go and the soils yield good harvests."

"There are some runestones left at Osterlars. One of them mentions two men, Emund and Broder. Your name is Emund. I realise it can't be you because the runes are generations older than you are, but could it be a relative of yours?"

The runestone now stands in the porch (vapenhus) of the church. It was found in 1921, set in a wall supporting the church's steeple. The carvings read: "Broder and Emund set this stone after their father Sigmund. May Christ and Saint Michael and Saint Mary help his soul."

"Only chieftains and greater landowners had runestones set in remembrance of them ... so, yes this was a distant relative of mine. Sigmund was said to have been the first to build a church on this site. But we can't know for sure."

"For my meeting on Bornholm I was looking for someone who'd been involved in the building of the Osterlars church and this put me in touch with you. You paid for this enormous stone building, yet your name is not known in my time. This is actually the case for most churches in Scandinavia; we don't know the names of the people who built them. Any idea why this is so?"

The man looks at me sternly at first, but then shakes his head.

"This is typical! You remember the names of many medieval kings and rich and powerful priests. But we, who made it possible for these potentates to have a roof over their heads and food on their table, are conveniently forgotten. But you see – and I'll let you in on a secret here – it doesn't matter one bit! God knows what we

did and we have our reward in heaven.”

The larger part of the visible remains from the Middle Ages in Scandinavia consists of church buildings. There are no written documents, but thousands of these stone buildings still tell their exciting stories; the buildings themselves and their contents serving our curiosity. The marks on the stones tell of the mason’s technique, holes in the walls show traces of the scaffolding, revealing how the building was constructed. Not to mention all the artwork. The baptismal fonts are among the largest collection of works of art that remain from the 12th century. They are often incredibly well sculpted with images of people, animals and other elaborate motifs.

Stone churches were built in Scandinavia already in the 11th century. One of the oldest churches of stone that we know of is Saint Clement’s church in Roskilde. Already in 1030 the first stone church was erected on this site, but only a portico now



The building of the crypt of Lund Cathedral started in the 1080s.

remains. In the mid 11th century, the predecessor of the cathedral in Lund was built and successively demolished as work started on the present-day cathedral in about 1080. The same happened in Dalby close by.

In Varnhem in Westrogothia, well preserved remains of a stone church, built probably around 1030, have been found next to a medieval Cistercian monastery. The church is noteworthy because it had a cellar extending under the whole of the nave. Westrogothia was converted to Christianity quite early, judging by the number of ancient stone churches found there. Using dendrochronology on preserved roof timber, two other Westrogothian churches have been dated to the 11th century. The roof of the church at Gökhem was laid in 1077, and the church still stands today. A few years later, in 1093, the nearby Göteve church was also nearing completion.

There are large number of medieval churches, but only in a very few cases do we know who built and paid for them. Early researchers assumed that it was the free farmers who were responsible, but according to recent finds it is more likely to have been local chieftains instead.

”So it was your idea to build this church, then?”

”Not mine alone. I spoke in favour of it, certainly. There were a few of us who were powerful enough to have a say in it.”

”What do you know about your family and its relation to Bornholm? Had you lived here for long?”

The man smiles and licks his lips. Maybe his mouth is dry from keeping quiet for nearly 800 years. I offer him a glass of carbonated mineral water, which seems to do him good.

”Our oldest known relative, Blood-Egil, was never spoken of outside the family. It was a bit of a disgrace, really. But I don’t

suppose anyone will be offended if I mention him now, so long after.”

His real name was Egil Ragnarson and he was a great warrior, son of a chieftain on the Danish island of Fyn. One day, the king’s man here on Bornholm died and Egil was given nine of the royal farmsteads (kungsgårdar) on the island, whilst the king kept three for himself. Egil was a good man; he was well liked and he was generous with his money. He was also a fierce warrior who defended the island well against enemies with his many faithful men. And every summer he went off raiding like a real Viking should.

One summer when they were on a raid to the coast of the Slavs, Egil met with a big fleet of enemy ships. The battle was hard, but finally my ancestor managed to strike down the enemy leader, and that gave him victory. Egil sat down exhausted and called for a drink of water. All the barrels onboard had been smashed and the water was sloshing about at the bottom of the boat, mixed with all the blood that had been spilled during the fighting. Egil then took off his helmet, scooped up some of the blood-mixed water and drank deeply without flinching. Thus he got his nick-name Blood-Egil”.

I didn’t know of this story beforehand, so afterwards I did some research and in fact found support for his story in the old Knýtlinga Saga.

This is supposed to have happened during the reign of Knut the Holy, 1080 - 1086. According to the saga, the king was very angry with Egil because he had gone off on Viking raids without the king’s consent. This was the beginning of Egil’s misfortune.

”Yes, my ancestor thus fell in grave disfavour with his king. Drinking human blood was not a Christian thing to do. To atone, Egil promised to go to confession and reduce the number of his retainers. But he never did. The king soon came to visit and he was treated to a grand feast. The feast was held in Egil’s great banquet



Many Northmen went far and wide on “Viking”. The Baltic Sea was dangerous and merchants could seldom travel in safety.

hall with walls adorned with beautiful shields, and it went on for three days. At first the king was pleased, but then when he noticed that Egil kept a princely court and had more men-at-arms than before, he got angry and sailed off.

A Norse ship with a rich cargo came to Bornholm a short while after. Egil attacked and plundered the ship. He also had the crew fettered inside the ship and set fire to it. When the king heard about this, he went to Bornholm with his men, had Egil's house surrounded and captured him. After a swift trial, Blood-Egil was hung from a gallows erected in his own back yard.

Not much to brag about, eh? You see now why we don't talk about him outside the family?"

What can one say? Opposing one's king like that ... confronting the church ... drinking human blood. Well, well, truly an amazing man, that Egil Ragnarson.

"You mentioned earlier that the king had many farmsteads on the island. But when did the church take over on Bornholm?"

Emund takes a large swig of the mineral water. With a resounding burp he rids himself of the gas.

"Towards the middle of the 12th century, 1149 I think it was. The king got into a quarrel with Archbishop Eskil in Lund. One day the king's men broke into Lundagård, the archbishop's fortified seat next to the cathedral in Lund. They caught Eskil, but I don't really know what happened then. Some say he was put in a basket and hoisted up to the vaulted ceiling of the cathedral, some say he was locked up for days, high up in the cathedral's belfry.

The king soon regretted his deed and to make up, he gave Eskil the town of Åhus in Eastern Scania and three of Bornholm's four hundreds as a present. Eskil was very industrious. He immediately started building a stronghold on the cliffs of Bornholm's

northernmost point. He called it Hammershus. It was built completely of stone, the art of making bricks and brickwork not being common knowledge at the time. A high stone wall encircled it, with stone buildings right up to the wall on the inside. To get in, you had to pass through a big stone tower. Inside, the archbishop also had a private chapel built.

Yes, that clergyman of Lund was indeed a hard-working man!"

Hammershus is today one of Northern Europe's largest medieval castle ruins. The original buildings at the centre are of stone, whereas the rest was built of brick, probably during the first part of the 13th century. The king also built a castle on Bornholm, called Lilleborg. Little is known about it; it was probably built towards the end of the 12th century and was considerably smaller than Hammershus. Only ruins now remain of Lilleborg too; it was attacked and destroyed already in 1259.

At the same time as the construction of Hammershus, Archbishop Eskil built a castle in Åhus, and also of stone. The lower parts of a grand palace building can still be made out, as can the remains of the tower that housed the archbishop's living quarters. Next to it stood a huge keep, also of stone.

Now I would like to know more about the church at Osterlars, where we are actually sitting. Bornholm has several round churches, but this is the biggest.

"What was it like when the archbishop inaugurated the church?"

"The archbishop, with a large number of his clergy in waiting, and the chosen priest, met the people of the surrounding area outside the church. Here the archbishop spoke about all the important things to remember in the future, like what date the church was inaugurated and what holy relics were kept in its altar. He then led a solemn procession around the church three times, sprinkling holy water on its walls. The clergy in waiting swung their thuribles - the



The inner part of Hammershus was started already in the 12th century.

smoke from the incense symbolised the prayers rising to heaven.

Then it was time to go in. The archbishop struck the closed church door hard thrice with his crook, before opening the door and going inside. Hark! Can't you hear the echo of the banging, still ringing out in the church below?"

The old man is dreaming, of course. I can't hear any echoes! Maybe the thick, heavy stone walls are reverberating, but no, Emund must be imagining things. Being 800 years old, his hearing is bound to be a bit weak.

"The ceremony inside was very carefully prepared. Inside the church, on a small part of the floor, we had spread a mixture of sand and ash in the shape of a cross. With his crook, the archbishop then drew the characters of both the Latin and the Greek alphabets in the ash. We had also drawn twelve crosses on the inner walls of

the church, and in the middle of each cross there was a lit candle, set in wrought-iron candleholders. The archbishop walked round to each cross striking it with his crook and praying. Then he went up to the high altar. There were five crosses carved into the stone, symbolising the five wounds Christ suffered when he was crucified. These crosses were now anointed with two kinds of holy oil: the 'Chrism' and the 'Catechumen'.

Then it was time for the relics. We who had backed the construction of the church were allowed to personally hand over the holy object, which was then laid in a hewn cavity in the altar and then plastered over. Now the altar had been charged with holy powers; in effect it had become a martyr's grave of the saint whose relic now resided there. Then the archbishop went to the Virgin Mary's altar and put relics in there too."

Osterlars church was consecrated in honour of Saint Laurentius. Laurentius was the martyr who in A.D. 258 had refused to relinquish the church's possessions to the Roman Emperor, and as punishment was grilled on an iron grid. Saint Laurentius is the patron saint of the diocese of Lund and the cathedral in Lund is also consecrated to him. It is thus not surprising that one of the largest churches on Bornholm is consecrated to Saint Laurentius



Only ruins remain of the royal castle at Lilleborg.



Image of Saint Laurentius' gridiron carved in stone at Hammershus.

as well. After all, most of the island belonged to the church. The archbishop's Hammershus also has a stone with a grid carved into it, the symbol of Saint Laurentius.

Lund cathedral had a medieval relic of Saint Laurentius set inside a big silver figure of the saint. The cathedral also had 416 other holy objects. An old inventory tells us about some of them:

"All these effigies contained relics as follows:

One head of silver, also another crowned head of silver, in that the head of Saint Laurentius.

The arm of King Canute the Holy, inside another arm of silver holding the royal orb and on top of that a crucifix.

Saint Clement's fingers inside a hand of silver.

Saint Birgitta's fingers inside a silver hand holding a pen.

One gilt silver crown, and in that, parts of Christ's crown of thorns."

"Which is the church's holiest part?"

"The high altar, of course, and the baptism font. The font was always near the door, so that anyone not baptised could be baptised without really entering the church. Heathens were not allowed inside, you see and even the smallest child was considered pagan before it had been dipped in the holy water and given a Christian name. Therefore it was a good idea to have font close by the door."

"All fonts from the 12th century are large vessels. Did you empty out the water after each baptism?"

Emund looks at me in a way I can't describe.

"Are you mad? The whole child has to go under, so the font had to be full. You couldn't throw out such amounts of holy water! Of course we saved it until next time. To stop people from stealing the water, a heavy wooden lid was put over the top."

"But what happened in the winter? It must have been freezing cold in the church. You didn't have any heating, did you? And children had to be baptised right after birth. Did you really dip them in that ice-cold water?"

"Of course! Sometimes we added a little warm water, but a bit of cold water never did anyone any harm!"

The word font is derived from the Latin 'fons' meaning well. Early Christians used running water, reminiscent of John the Baptist's christening of Jesus in the river Jordan. Baptisms could also be performed in a baptistry, a kind of basin set indoors. The baptistry in Jerusalem was particularly famous. Soon Christians began to keep the water in smaller vessels and the church council at Lleida in 524 ruled that fonts should preferably be made of stone, although metal was acceptable.

The baptismal ceremony was cherished and carried out as an

act of exorcism, to drive out Satan and all evil. The child was given salt in the mouth, was anointed with holy oil and was then immersed completely in a large and deep font.

Today, most remaining fonts from the Middle Ages are of stone, but there were fonts made of wood as well. One example is a wooden font from the 13th century found in Näs in Jämtland, in northern Sweden. The font's outer side and rim often had pictures of episodes in Christian history on it.

”But Emund, I must ask: why is the church round? There are many theories, many have wondered. Some say it was for defence purposes, some say it came from the crusades and pilgrimages to the holy land.”



The medieval font in Åkirkeby Church on Bornholm shows scenes from the life of Christ. Here a depiction of his entry into Jerusalem, and his flogging.



The 12th century font in the church in Löberöd, east of Ystad, shows the Norse king Olaf, dying a martyr's death at the battle of Stiklestad, in the year 1030.

Emund shakes his head, rises and walks up to one of the small arrow slits in the wall. He opens the wooden hatch and asks me to come over and look out.

”Why would a round wall be an advantage when defending the church? How much of the outer wall can you see from here? From a rectangular tower you'd be able to see the whole wall. Much better if you needed to defend it.”

”So the round churches were not for defence, then?”

”Don't jump to conclusions now. Of course the stone churches could be used for defence too, the builder would have been silly not to take that into account. But the round form originates from Christ's church in Jerusalem, which was round. By building a round church, or adding a round tower west of an old church, a

man could show that he had seen the Holy Land. He and his family members were eventually interred in the church, thus creating a long-lasting personal memorial for him.”

What an astonishing thought! What if the sponsors of every round church on Bornholm - Osterlars, Saint Ols, Nylars and Ny - had travelled to the Holy Land as pilgrims in the 12th century? Might they even have been Knights Templar? Perhaps met Richard the Lionhearted of England? I turn round in excitement, but the chairs are empty. My guests have disappeared.



This 14th century bronze sculpture in Lund Cathedral depicts the patron saint of the archdiocese, St. Laurentius, with the gridiron on which he was martyred.

The Viking and Early Middle Ages in Scania and on Bornholm

In the three unlikely encounters above, I've had the honour of conversing with six people from a thousand years ago who each played an important part in the histories of Scania, Bornholm and Poland. For a short while they stepped out of the mists of distant history, the mists that obscure what really happened, once upon a time. In preparation of these encounters and to have as much support as possible for their stories, I had gathered all historical material on the times of these people that I could find; old manuscripts, papers on archaeological excavations and data on ancient monuments and finds. As always, when there are only random fragments remaining, it is difficult to know for sure what really happened. I believe my guests were telling the truth, but one can never know.

Maybe I asked the wrong question because an old document told a false story? Perhaps archaeologists don't have the whole picture clear, because so much material is still buried underground. Despite all the reservations, however, meeting these six people in these incredible juxtapositions in time and space, has truly given me, at least, a memory for life.

The Viking concept

The word "Viking" is not a modern one. It was used already a thousand years ago, then exclusively for people (men) who travelled widely on pillaging raids or waging war. It was not used for travelling merchants; this distinction is clearly made in a passage in the "Egil Skallagrimsson Saga" from the middle of the 10th century: "Bjorn was a great traveller, sometimes he went on a "Viking", sometimes on peaceful trading trips." The chieftain Fader created a monument at Västra Strö, in Scania, dated to the end of the 10th century, where on two runestones it says: "Father had these runes carved after his brother Asser, who met his death in a 'Viking' in the North" and "Father had this stone carved after Bjorn who owned a ship together with him". The second stone's text refers to a battle in Norway or Sweden, so the word "Viking" here probably means he was a warrior, rather than a raider.

The word "Viking" thus seems to relate to special circumstances or activities that people of the time were engaged in. Bjorn in the first example was considered a great traveller, i.e. he often travelled on peaceful trade missions, but he could also go "on Viking", i.e. raiding and pillaging. Asser, on the other hand, had probably been involved in some campaign in the wars between Nordic kings or chieftains.

The oldest mention of the word "Viking" is in the Anglo-Saxon epic Widsith, where it is written "Wicingas". The events the epic describes probably took place in the 7th century, but it is uncertain when the epic itself was actually written, and the word is mentioned only once. The next mention is in the story of Beowulf, describing events in the 6th century, but not put in writing until the 8th century. In this poem the word "wig" is used for battle or

fight, and "wigend" for warrior or champion. From this term for a Nordic warrior, the name for a whole era in Scandinavian history is derived - the Viking Age. The concept was established relatively recently, however; the Danish archaeologist Worsaae first used it in 1873 and four years later the renowned Swedish archaeologist Montelius was using the concept too, and thus it was firmly established.

The Viking Age thus came to mean the latter part of the Iron Age in Scandinavian history, before the Middle Ages began. One characteristic of this age is that it saw the advent of written material that described the conditions in Scandinavia at that time. These documents, albeit to a very limited extent, are an important complement to the material and the knowledge archaeologists are able to unearth.

So when did the Viking Age begin and when did it end? The answer to this question has varied over the years. First it was said to have begun in A.D. 793, with the Viking attack on the monastery at Lindisfarne on the east coast of England. A contemporary source states the following: "On the 8th of June, heathens shamefully destroyed God's church on Lindisfarne, with plundering and killing." But by the time the Vikings reached Lindisfarne, visiting Europe in force like this, their culture must already have reached its peak. The Vikings must thus have started developing considerably earlier.

Very few written sources exist from these days, however, so we have to rely on what the archaeologists can tell us. During the 1980s, some very rich graves from the 8th century, of chieftains and their families, were found on Bornholm. At the same time, using dendrochronology, the impressive "Danevirke" system of defence fortifications across southern Jutland was dated to the 8th century.

This suggests the existence of an organised society well before the Viking Age is supposed to have begun.

If the Viking Age thus started already around A.D. 700, and was a result of a long development process, when then did it end? The battle of Hastings in England in 1066 is traditionally considered a turning point in history, but this event had little effect on conditions in Scandinavia. Here, the year 1103 is much more significant, because it was then that the Danish king together with the Danish clergy managed to separate Scandinavia from the German church. The seat of the Archbishop for all of Scandinavia was established in Lund, and Scandinavia became a part of the West European community in its own right.

Viking travels

What mostly contributed to the fame of the Vikings was their way of sweeping across vast expanses of sea and land, raiding and exploring. This remarkable wave of conquests was made possible by the invention and development of the Nordic longship. Up until the 6th or 7th centuries these ships probably didn't have any



Ruins of the monastery at Lindisfarne, sacked by Vikings. Photo: Russ Hamer, Wiki Commons.



Picture stone from Gotland. Photo: Berig, Wiki Commons.

sails, at least there are no finds or documents to suggest this. The ships were rowed, and this laborious technique obviously did not allow for any longer journeys in open seas. However, several archaeological findings have established that the early longships were actually quite seaworthy, the most famous being the so-called Nydam-ship, from around A.D. 300, found on southern Jutland.

Sails are seen for the first time on picture stones dating from A.D. 600-700, on Gotland, in the Baltic Sea. Relatively narrow lengths of cloth were plaited to produce the strong, characteristic single square sail of the Viking ship. The appearance of these sails on the horizons of the Baltic Sea marks the real starting point for the northern expansionist era we call the Viking Age.

Monks of various monasteries describe how Vikings began raiding the coasts of Western Europe at the end of the 8th century. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, among other sources, has an account of Dorchester on the south coast of England being attacked at some point in 786-793 by Vikings coming on three ships:

”This year (787), King Bertric took Edburga, daughter of Offa, as his wife. And in his days the first three ships of Northmen came from the land of Raiders. The Sheriff rode there to take them to the king, but he did not know what kind of people they were and was killed. These were the first ships with Danes to come to England.”

A few years later, the monastery at Lindisfarne on the east coast of England was sacked, and after that, reports of Viking attacks became more and more frequent. Ireland was attacked too and soon the Northmen also settled on this island. The European mainland was not spared either; Hamburg was burned in 845 and Paris was besieged in 885-6. A great Viking fleet also attacked Spain. The Vikings then sailed around Spain attacking southern France and northern Italy. France suffered raiding and fighting throughout the century.

A question to be asked, of course, is what economic forces might have been behind the violent Viking expansion? Why did the Northerners start their raiding and pillaging, taking large numbers of slaves, precisely around A.D. 800? One possible explanation is that Charlemagne (Charles the Great) the mighty ruler of most of western Europe at the time forbade slavery, as it was considered an un-Christian practice. It is not unlikely then, that the efforts of Charlemagne to curb this trade resulted in a perfect opening for

the keen and capable tradesmen of the North to deal in another very lucrative alternative merchandise - slaves. The first mention of Vikings on the borders between France and Spain coincides, in fact, with the first attacks on England.

The Vikings settled by the river Ebre, which leads up to Tortosa, then home to one of the largest slave-markets in Europe. From here they could control the inlet from the Atlantic. There are still several place-names of Scandinavian origin along this river.

These are the Viking raids that are well known today far beyond the borders of modern Scandinavia. But the Northmen did not only travel with weapon in hand. Far greater, in fact, were the numbers of peaceful explorers, merchants and traders. They came from all over Norway, Sweden and Denmark, often accompanied by their families. Some ended up settling in many foreign countries. In the 9th century around four thousand families moved from Norway to Iceland; in the 980s, the Viking Erik the Red discovered Greenland and settled there. His son, Leif Eriksson sailed to North America



Northmen from Greenland reached Canada ca A.D. 1000. Remains of a settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows.

and founded settlements there. Most likely he also went south, along the east coast of America, but there is no documentation to support this assumption. The Danes settled in England and in Normandy; the Sweons went east and formed colonies in Russia along the rivers down to the Black Sea. Arabic sources from the 840s mention Nordic tradesmen going east, along the northern coast of Africa, to Damascus and Baghdad, and even reaching China.

About the southern Baltic Sea a thousand years ago

In the 9th century, Denmark as such did not yet exist. Instead there were a large number of petty kingdoms. Bornholm, for example, had a king of its own in the 870s. During the second half of the 10th century, various rulers began to make attempts at creating what was eventually to become the three Nordic kingdoms: Norway, Denmark and Sweden. An attempt at unifying Norway had, however, been started by Harald Fairhair during his long period of reign, 872-930, but it was not until the time of his successors Eric Bloodaxe, 930-934 and Haakon the Good, 934-961, that it became firmly established. In the 970s, Harold Bluetooth conquered most of the land that was to become modern Denmark. The country of Sweden takes form somewhat later, maybe around the middle of the 12th century. The succession of events in Sweden's early history is disputed, due to a lack of reliable written sources.

Mention the Viking Age and most people think of areas outside Scandinavia. However, the neighbouring areas around the Baltic Sea were also of great interest to the early Scandinavian kings, chieftains and merchants. On the two largest islands, Gotland and Bornholm, rich cultures developed, showing influences from many contacts across the seas. Bornholm, with its strategic location, has always been a stepping stone for seafarers between Scania and the shores of the southern Baltic.

Already during the Bronze Age more than three thousand years ago, Bornholm was of importance to seafarers. This is obvious

from the many stone carvings depicting ships from the time that have been found on the island. Rich graves from the early Viking Age around A.D. 700 show the existence of a large population on the island, with wealthy chieftains and successful tradesmen. In 1987, one of South Scandinavia's richest grave fields of the time was unearthed on Bornholm. No less than fifty graves from A.D. 600 – 800 were excavated. The dead had been buried in wooden coffins, wearing their finest attire. The women had beautiful bronze jewellery, sometimes gilded and studded with garnets. Bracelets, chains and beautiful glass pearls were found in abundance. The men had been buried with their sword, spear and shield – sometimes also with their horse in a separate grave alongside.

Many of the ships that came to Bornholm in those days were on their way to or from what we today call Poland and Germany, then the homelands of the Slavs, a collective name for many rich and influential peoples. Scandinavians referred to them as "Wends" and called their country Wendland. In the west were the Polabian Slavs, divided into several tribes. From Kiel to Rostock, by the river Warnow, lay the land of the Obotrites, extending south along the Elbe river. Important settlements included Alt-Lübeck, Oldenburg, Plön, Scharstorf and Ratzeburg.

From the river Warnow south-east to the river Mildenitz ruled the Warnavi, who were closely related to the Obotrites, as were the Linones along the river Elbe and the Drewani-tribe around Hanover. East of the Obotrites were the Liutizies, who with their four tribes ruled the lands from the river Warnow to the river Oder. Rügen was the homeland of the Rani.

East of Oder was the land later to become Poland under Mieszko I, ca 960-992. Mieszko quickly realised that Christianity gave great powers to a worldly leader and he therefore allied his huge realm with the Holy See and let himself be baptised in 966. The 960s saw a wide-sweeping Christianisation process throughout the Slavic area. In the west, Mistivoj, the father-in-law of Harold Bluetooth, king of the Danes, had secured Obotrite sovereignty over the Wagrians. A year later, the Christian diocese in Oldenburg was



Warship from Viking times. Medieval wall painting in Skamstrup church on Zealand.

founded. Mistivoj took the Christian faith, which he seems to have kept for the rest of his life. He ended his days at the monastery in Bardowiek and he always kept close contact with the bishops in Oldenburg.

Viking ships

Goods and people were most easily transported on water in those days. Nowadays it is mostly the warships of the Viking Ages, the longships or dragon ships, which are talked about. These were slender, relatively light ships that could carry 60 to 100 men. However, most of the ships that came to or passed by Bornholm were trading ships or transport ships. We know what these types of ships were called from written sources of the time.

The "karvi" was a "peacetime" ship. Owners of such ships, even though they were small vessels, had a high status. In the Egil Skallagrimsson Saga, we can read that the sides of the karvi were colourfully painted: "They owned one karvi, which was rowed by twelve or thirteen men at each side and it carried nearly thirty men. They had won this ship during this summer's Viking. It was painted above the waterline and it was very beautiful. When they came to Tore, they were well received and stayed for a while. The karvi had been pulled up and secured under a tent by the farm." Both the limited size of the vessel and its high status factor are evident later in the Saga, when Ragnvald's (king's son) ship is described: "He owned a six-oared karvi, all painted above the waterline. In it he had ten or twelve men who always accompanied him."

Ships were built in many different shapes and sizes. Some were small and fast, some propelled by up to thirty oarsmen. The most significant was the "knarr", which was a real cargo ship, propelled only by sail, but with high sides allowing a cargo capacity of up to 24 tons. With the knarrs, the Northmen could venture cross the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean even with livestock onboard, thus enabling their widespread colonisation of the Atlantic islands. When Egil Skallagrimsson and his friend Kvällulv (Dusk wolf)

once were preparing to sail off, they "equipped two large knarrs for the journey, each carrying thirty fighting men, and women and children."

The merchant and cargo ships mostly traversed the established routes, sailing to the early cities and trading posts that dotted the coasts of the southern Baltic Sea a thousand years ago.

Far away to the west was Hedeby in Schleswig, the most important merchant city of Viking Age Denmark. Archaeologists have here unearthed remains of buildings from the second half of the 8th century. In the mid 10th century a huge semicircular rampart was built around the city. In the 820s, the missionary Ansgar visited Hedeby and the trading centre Ribe further north.

There were many international trading centres in Scania in the early Viking Age. These were called "köpingar" and no less than six such centres have been identified on the Scanian coast. Archaeological investigations have dated the buildings in two of these; the centres seem to have been active for about two hundred years, A.D. 800-1000. However the settlements were probably seasonal, populated only during the yearly markets.

Uppåkra, just south of Lund in western Scania, has extensive finds of buildings from the period A.D. 100-900. The site was then without a doubt a very important centre for western Scania. A similar site has recently been discovered north of Ravlunda on the east coast of Scania. The concentration of buildings on these sites is clear evidence of their significance in the life of people of the times, but as no written documentation has been found on them it is not possible to ascertain their rationale or use; they may have been centres for worship or permanent trade, or just town-like settlements for the protection of farmers. Or all of these things, we will probably never know for sure.

There were several trading posts along the southern Baltic Sea coast, and early cities such Hedeby, as mentioned above, and



Excavations at Uppåkra south of Lund have yielded incredibly rich finds from the Iron Age. Here one can see the stave holes of a large longhouse.

Jumne, present-day Wolin. Jumne was definitely the largest, with a population that came from all over Europe and even further afield. Adam of Bremen describes it in the 1060s as one of the biggest cities in northern Europe.

Pagan beliefs

Before Christianity was established in Scandinavia, people in northern Europe worshipped a number of beings such as gods, giants, trolls and wights, etc. It was important to stay friendly with the wights. For example, if a warship with a dragon's head on its prow neared a shore, it was important to take the dragon head down, in order not to frighten the wights on land.

One important pagan practice was that of offering to the gods. An Arabic man named Ibn Fadlān witnessed an offering ceremony in 922 at an anchorage on the river Volga. "A Nordic merchant

went ashore to make an offering. He took food and drink with him and went to a high pole set in the ground, with a human-like face carved into it. There were small wooden figures around the pole, and these in turn were surrounded by another ring of high poles. The merchant threw himself down to the ground in front of the big figure, placing his offerings at the foot of the pole and prayed for good trade. If the trading was good, he returned and offered a number of animals. Some of the meat was given away; some was piled around the pole."

Most pagan rites consisted of two parts: first food and drink were offered to the gods; thereafter there was a feast at which those present ate and drank of the offerings. There are several contemporary tales about these great offering feasts (blót) with lots of food and drink. Most are from the then still pagan areas south of the Baltic Sea. Bishop Gregorius of Tours, (died A.D. 594), describes with Christian disgust the gluttonous barbarians in heathen Cologne. The missionary Columban (died A.D. 615) once encountered a heathen celebration somewhere in present-day Germany. An enormous container of beer was the centrepiece of a great feast in honour of the god Wodin. Columban managed to shatter the barrel by breathing on it! Or at least this is what he himself wrote about the episode.

Another eyewitness report, now from the Nordic scene, comes from the Arab Aṭ-Ṭarṭūš, who in the 10th century visited the great Viking city of Hedeby, in southern Jutland. Aṭ-Ṭarṭūš describes a feast where the city's heathen inhabitants get together to honour their gods and to eat and drink:

"Those participating have a sacrificial animal slaughtered and be it an ox, a ram, a goat or a pig, they hang it on a scaffold outside their door to show everyone that they have made their offering in honour of the gods."

Humans too, were offered as a part of certain heathen rites. Adam of Bremen describes such a sacrifice taking place in the 1060s at

the temple in Uppsala, north of Stockholm:

”Every ninth year a common feast is celebrated in Uppsala. People from all Sweon lands gather and no one has leave to desist. Kings and tribes, all and sundry, were required to send their offerings to Uppsala. They who had already taken the Christian faith had to buy themselves free from participation in the ceremony, a rite more cruel than any punishment. The rite is observed thus: nine males from every kind of living being are sacrificed; their blood shall conciliate the gods. The carcasses are hung in a grove near the temple. This grove is held to be most holy by the pagans, each tree with divine powers derived from the death and decay of the offerings. There are dead bodies of dogs and horses and men. One Christian told me he once saw seventy-two bodies hanging there.”

There are tales of human sacrifices from Denmark as well. The bishop and historian Thietmar of Merseburg (975-1018) tells us about the feasts at Lejre, near Roskilde on Zealand. “Every ninth year in January, hordes of people would gather there and sacrifice 99 people, together with as many horses, dogs and cockerels.”

The foremost of the Nordic gods was Odin, god of wisdom but also of warfare. His mount was the mythical eight-legged horse Sleipnir. He had gained his wisdom by sacrificing one of his eyes in Mimir’s well. Thor was the strong god who rode across the skies on his goat-drawn chariot, in constant battle with the giants. His weapon, the great hammer Mjölnir, when hurled at an enemy, always returned to its master. Thunder and lightning were believed to be evidence of Thor’s battles. Gods of love were Frey and Freya. The latter could be seen in light summer evenings, traversing the sky in her cart drawn by cats, her favourite animals.

In addition to these gods there were also many other divine entities. The rainbow, ”Bifrost” was, for instance considered to be the bridge to the world of the gods. A problem when trying to understand the history of paganism in the North, however, is that nearly all sources are by Christian authors. They probably

deliberately adjusted their accounts, belittling and ridiculing pagan traditions, to make Christianity seem more attractive.

From Heathen to Christian times

On Jutland, by the village Jelling, stands a large runestone with the inscription: ”Harold the king let make these stones after Gorm his father and after Tyra, his mother. The Harold who won all Denmark and Norway and made Danes Christian.” It is Harold Bluetooth who had these stones raised here in the 960s, and who ruled Denmark until the middle of the 980s. It was from this stronghold on Jutland that he conquered a large part of southern Scandinavia, with the military aid of his father-in-law, the Obotrite king Mistivoj. He built a number of ring-castles, (trelleborg) to guard the occupied territories and to house his garrisons. He also



A map showing the churches of early medieval Lund. The probable site of one of Harold Bluetooth’s trelleborgs is also marked.

had a church built right outside each such trelleborg, to symbolise that his conquered lands were Christian. These early churches were probably all consecrated to Saint Clement.

In Scania, trelleborgs have been found in the (aptly named) town of Trelleborg and in Borgeby, 20 km north-west of Lund. There was probably one at Helsingborg as well. Bornholm was most likely conquered too, and a trelleborg built, possibly on the northern side of the island where there is a church of Saint Clement, Klemensker. The church indicates that Harold Bluetooth did have a foothold on the island, but there is no written evidence of this. Perhaps future archaeological excavations may shed more light on these events.

Christianity was thus a new religion that was imposed on people by royal decree. The advantages for the sovereign were many. Paganism is a “free” religion, based largely on man’s relationship to nature, whereas with Christianity, the king is god’s representative on earth. To become Christian and make your people Christians too, thus gave a ruler considerably more power than he had ever had before. The establishment of Christianity also eventually resulted in the creation of royal administrations, with more efficient control of the population by using written documents and archives.

The pagan practices and their temples were eventually forced to give way to Christianity. Temples were demolished, groves cut down, and a large number of wooden churches were erected in their place all over the land. In Uppåkra, just south of Lund, the heathen temple disappeared and Harold Bluetooth probably moved the whole of the settlement a couple of kilometres north. There, protected by his trelleborg, the city of Lund started to develop in the 980s.

It is also around this time, towards the end of the 10th century, that nearly all Scanian runestones were raised. They appeared on Bornholm a couple of decades later. These memorials, then, were created by the first Christians, not by heathens. But why make



One of the runestones near the ruins of Östermarie medieval church on Bornholm.

them at all? And why now? There are many theories; one being that the name you are given in the act of baptism is holy because it is the name God knows you by. All runestones have many names carved into them. Maybe those erecting the stones thought they were helping the dead get to paradise by carving their names in everlasting stone. Later, during the 12th century it became customary to keep church records of those who had died, in order to remember them and pray for them. Perhaps runestones were the origin of these necrologies, “books of deaths”.

By A.D. 1103, the Danish crown and church had grown so strong that the Pope allowed the establishment of an archdiocese for all Scandinavia, the centre of which became Lund, in Scania. The 12th century thus saw a concentration of power to the Danish crown. The coasts of Denmark still suffered attacks by heathens from the southern coasts of the Baltic Sea, however, and finally the mighty bishop Absalon in Roskilde led the Danes on a crusade against



Blentarp church in Scania had a round tower added to the west gable towards the end of the 12th century.

those countries. In 1169, the large temple at Arkona on Rügen was attacked and bishop Absalon himself was present when the tall wooden sculpture of Svantevit, the god with four heads, was destroyed and the temple demolished.

Medieval times

Towards the end of the 12th and the beginning of the 13th century, Denmark grew to one of the most powerful kingdoms in northern Europe. War was waged against the Germans, and the city of Lübeck was won. These were also the times of the great crusades to the Holy Land. The powerful bishop in Lund, Andreas Sunesen, was granted the Pope's permission to wage his own crusade on the heathens in Estonia. The Pope guaranteed that those who “took the cross” to Estonia would enjoy the same favours as those who went to Palestine. If they fell, their souls would be in Heaven before their dead bodies hit the ground.

Bornholm has a large number of round churches and churches with a round west tower added. There are several such churches in Scania, too. One theory is that a round church was thought to be easier to defend, but nothing could be more wrong. Rounded walls impede the lines of sight for the defenders in a way that rectangular walls do not. Several of the round churches in Denmark and Sweden are also found inland, where a strong defence capacity could hardly have been required. Another more likely theory is that people returning from a crusade or a pilgrimage to Jerusalem built these round churches. Having seen the great church at Golgotha, which is round, it is quite probable that a returning chieftain would build his church in its likeness. It was the parish church, but it was also a memorial to the chieftain himself, and the place where he and his family would be buried. The church at Hammarlunda in Scania has a round west tower that was added to the original church. Excavating archaeologists have found noble family graves in its walls. Both the building of round churches and the adding of west towers in the latter part of the 12th century coincide with the peak of Nordic travels to the Holy Land, which supports the “Jerusalem theory”.

The 12th century was the time when the Christian church became firmly established in Scandinavia. The unity that had existed between the Crown and the Church in Denmark was not to last, however. The archbishops no longer wanted to serve any other master than the Pope in Rome, considering the church to be above all worldly powers wielded by kings and nobility. This was the start of an extended domestic division in Denmark. In 1150, the king had archbishop Eskil imprisoned in the cathedral in Lund. After a while, however, they were reconciled and the archbishop got three of the four hundreds on Bornholm as a conciliatory gift from the king. Eskil promptly started the building of Hammershus on northern Bornholm. This stronghold was extended during the beginning of the 13th century and eventually became one of the strongest stone fortresses in Europe.

The king immediately had a smaller castle, Lilleborg, built in order to mark his presence on the island too. This fortification existed only for a short period; already at the middle of the 13th century it was overrun in the fighting that started again between the church and the crown.

Many new coastal cities appeared in the 13th century due to the formation of the Hanseatic League. The Hansa, which had started already in the middle of the 12th century as a cooperation between guilds in German Baltic Sea trading cities, with Lübeck in the lead, now gained more power, and trade across the Baltic Sea flourished. In Scania, the towns Skanör, Falsterbo, Malmö, Ystad and Simrishamn were founded. None of these places had natural harbours though, so merchant ships had to anchor a bit off shore, and the cargoes were brought to shore on barges. Despite this drawback, however, these Danish towns prospered, and at the beginning of the 14th century, Rönne, on Bornholm, also got its town privileges. However, the Scandinavia towns of the time were relatively small. At the beginning of 16th century, Malmö, for instance, had only about 5,000 inhabitants whereas Hamburg had about 40,000.

So, what was the demographic distribution of the times like? Where did people live? The locations of the medieval churches give us a relatively good picture of the situation. Because each church marks the centre of a settlement area, a parish (socken), one can assume that the number of churches was related to the number of inhabitants. The more churches in an area, the larger the population. The church-count also offers a fairly good statistical base, as at least 80-85% of the actual number of churches is known.

The map shows the distribution of the churches, i.e. the population density in Denmark and Sweden during the late Viking and early Middle Ages. A number of agglomerations can be clearly identified. There are several in Denmark: the area on north-eastern Jutland, around the Viking city Aarhus is very densely populated, as is the Limfjord area on northern Jutland. There are two smaller densely populated areas on north-eastern Fyn. The big island Zealand has two main centres, one in the south-east and one around the Viking city of Roskilde. Scania's population concentrations lie in the south-west and in the south-east. In fact, nowhere else in Scandinavia are medieval churches found so close together as in south-western Scania.



Map showing the distribution of medieval churches in Denmark and Sweden. The closer the churches, the darker the area. Dots also mark known and probable locations of “trelleborgs” from the times of Harold Bluetooth, around 970-980.

The early history of Pomerania

Pomerania - the region shared nowadays between modern Poland and Germany, is one with a difficult history, marked by many wars and mutual hard feelings. Let me guide you, my Reader, through the times between the 5th and the 15th century. It is not known whether the name Pomerania was coined by its inhabitants, or whether it was an imported name. In time, however, this term caught on for good, regardless of what neighboring power the current local prince was loyal to.

The period between ca. 400 AD and the arrival of the first Slavonic incomers to (7th – 8th century) brought about a great civilization change. It was preceded by the migrations of Goths and Gepids from the North. Those two tribes moved down the river Vistula south, to finally reach the Black Sea and become a bloody chapter in the history and fall of the Roman Empire. It would be difficult, though, to picture all population leaving these lands at once. Some of those inhabitants remained in Pomerania, forming a society, which archaeologists commonly refer to as „the Dębczyno group” (from the village of Dębczyno near Białogard, where the greatest necropolis of that populace was discovered). We do not know who they were, and what name they applied to themselves. In fact, we also do not know what happened to those people later. What they left behind is a handful of artifacts discovered by archaeologists. They point back to an earlier civilization of the times when the Roman Empire played the dominant role in Europe.

The 5th and 6th centuries mark the period of the so-called Migration Period, caused by vehement push on Europe by the nomadic Huns from the East. In Pomerania several groups of migrants from Scandinavia could be found then, which is testified by the few findings of skeletal burials or treasures. One of such burial sites was found in Stramnica near Kołobrzeg. The most spectacular artifact from that period is the golden necklace from Piotrowice, cast in around 500 grams of gold, now kept in the museum in Greifswald,

Germany. Golden artifacts were also discovered in a swamp deposit in Karlino: two golden rings, one bearing a runic inscription.

The 7th century marks the beginning of Slavonic expansion to Pomerania. The Slavs - that mysterious people! It is hardly known when they first appeared in what is modern Poland. Their origin is unknown... The first unambiguous mentions on them came from the Byzantine chroniclers in the 6th century. One thing that is certain, is that they were an Indo-European people who, in the Early Middle Ages, colonized almost all Central and Eastern Europe. It is surprising that a people with such a basic (as it would appear to us) material civilization – managed to conquer almost half of the continent. The traces of their appearance can be found in such remote places as the areas next to the river Elbe and the Peloponnese. An amazing achievement for a people who did not use the potter's wheel, lived in small earth-lodges, did not possess an alphabet and never built any stone buildings.

It was only in the beginning of the 7th century in Pomerania that the first groups of Slavonic migrants started settling down. In that period they would pick the most fertile areas, and therefore the easiest ones to farm – in Pyrzyce in the west of the region, and along the biggest rivers – the Odra, Rega and Parsęta. The list of findings from that period is so short that it is really difficult to describe their culture in detail. What is known of them is that they were farmers who added to their diet what they could hunt or gather.

Let us return to Pomerania. It took about a century for the Slavs to spread all over the region. It was between the 7th and 8th century that the first burgh cities appeared in the region. Who lived there? What was their function? They may have been home to local chiefs, rivals continuously striving for popularity among the neighboring communities. But in those times economical status, and thus also the political one did not consist in gathering riches, but... giving them out. The latter signified one's prestige and the fact that the person is enjoying particular divine protection. Therefore, people would eagerly gather around such a magnate. A few well-defined



The large and well preserved grave field from the Pomeranian Iron Age at Grzybnica, south of Koszalin. The graves are marked by different round stone formations.

settlements appeared. Perhaps they had tribal character. One was located around the middle and lower reaches of the Rega, between Białogard and Kołobrzeg. The others formed around Pyrzyce or Wolin.

In the 8th newcomers from Scandinavia appeared on Pomeranian soil: they are commonly referred to as the Vikings. Relics of their settlements were excavated by archaeologists e.g. in a hill fort in Bardo near Kołobrzeg and in tumuli in Świelubie. Characteristic women's' jewelry was found there: bronze tortoise brooches. The Scandinavians, however, had the greatest influence in Wolin and Szczecin, the trade emporia rising around the mouth of the Odra. It was from there that numerous findings of items imported from the North come: jewelry of extraordinary intricacy, vessels from Norway, or objects covered with runic inscriptions.

In the case of the above-mentioned first cities in Pomerania we encounter a considerable step-back in our research. For these cities are still living urban organisms, and though the centuries they developed, then suffered destruction and were reconstructed again. Their earliest history is buried deep below the ground, usually under existing structures. Therefore encompassing their culture fully is generally impossible, and the knowledge on that can only be based on the few and fragmentary findings. We do know from historical sources that they were places teeming with life, attracting merchants from all over Northern Europe and boasting numerous artisans' workshops.

The period between 10th and 11th century is described by historiography as the "Silver age" of Pomerania, as the region was going through a prosperous phase, numerous treasure deposits dating from that period be the proof. Generally, they consist of silver coins and ornaments, whole or cut into small pieces. Some of them were likely buried with a purpose of protecting them from being stolen. Some, however, seem to be purposely hidden as deposits of sacred character, placed in special locations, e.g. under great glacial erratic stones. As in later ages, the main product sold in market places was probably grain. However, apart from grain, slaves were commonly sold there, usually with a purpose to be sent to Arab countries. Sources mention Slavonic slaves being found even in the far-off Syria. Save activities typical for a society of farmers, that is cultivating the soil, breeding stock and artistry of various sorts, another important one was the exploitation of saltworks at the mouth of Parsęta, on the area of modern Kołobrzeg.

The rise of a new political entity in Greater Poland (symbolically, the date of Duke Mieszko I of Poland's baptism in 966 AD is popularly accepted as the date of its foundation) – the state of the Piast dynasty, posed a new, serious danger for Pomerania. Nearly from the start the Piast Dukes from Gniezno pushed towards subduing the region. They were likely interested in taking control of the big trade centers at the mouth of the Odra.



A popular place for day-trips today is the holy mountain of Chelmska near Koszalin.

It is notable that one of the first directions of Poland expansion was Odra's mouth. The fact that the Polabian Slavs were engaged in warfare with German princes forced the West Pomeranians to fight this danger alone. In 967 Mieszko I managed to conquer the Wolinian tribe. This policy of pushing westwards was continued by Bolesław I the Brave, son of Mieszko I in order to initiate a Christianization campaign there – in vain. The break out of the long war with Germany (1003 – 1018) put an end to his plans entirely, and facilitated the return to independence for the Pomeranians. Diplomatic actions of the court of Gniezno to bring about an alliance with the Pomeranian and Polabian tribes against the Germans failed. The interest the first Piasts had in Pomerania stemmed also from political plans aimed at building an alliance with Scandinavian rulers. Mieszko I's daughter Świętosława (known as Sigrid the Haughty, or Sigríð Storráða) married the Swedish king Eric in 985, and later – in 995 - the Danish ruler Sweyn I Forkbeard. The rule over Pomerania made it possible for the Piasts to maintain the economic and cultural exchange with the North. On the order of Bolesław I the Brave, a Christianization mission was conducted in Sweden by Bruno of Querfurt in ca. 1006 – 1007.

The events of years following that date forced Pomerania to move to the background of the theater of operations, which now was at the southern border of the monarchy of Polans. In the 1030s Poland found itself in deep crisis – a civil war, a destructive raid by the Czechs and temporary loss of the region of Masovia. The new Piast ruler, Casimir I the Restorer, was forced to focus his efforts on rebuilding the state and church infrastructure. The Pomerania-Poland relations were likely limited to cyclic near-border raids in order to capture bounty and slaves. We do not know of any more significant actions. In 1046 Casimir of Poland, Bretislaus of Bohemia and Zemuzil of Pomerania met at the imperial court in Merseburg. Emperor Henry III set out to settle the conflicts between the three Dukes. While the Polish-Czech conflict was probably about Silesia, we cannot tell anything about the reasons for the Polish-Pomeranian one. We also do not know what the Emperor's decision was. We do see, however, that the three Dukes appeared

before the imperial majesty as equals, which makes Pomerania of the time a power which could not be ignored. Later Piast rulers, Bolesław II the Bold, Władysław I Herman and Zbigniew of Poland, due to internal turmoil, the weakness of the authority of the Duke and focus of foreign affairs on other matters decided to leave the Pomeranian issue in the background. Thanks to that, Pomerania could enjoy its autonomy for a longer period of time.

The year 1000 was an important one for the Piast Poland, and also for Pomerania. In Gniezno, Bolesław I the Brave of Poland met with Emperor Otto III. The talks took place in friendly atmosphere and ended in agreement on building Church infrastructure within the Piast dominion. Apart from the bishopric in Poznań (founded in 968) three more were founded: in Krakow, Wrocław and Kołobrzeg, with the province in Gniezno. This way, Poland acquired its own Church administration, independent of any other country. A newcomer from Germany, Reinbern, was chosen as the bishop of Kołobrzeg. The only sure thing we know about him is that he descended from an aristocratic family. The bishop energetically took to Christianization from the very start, destroying the nearby centers of Pagan worship. However, his stay in Pomerania was really short. We do not know in what circumstances he was forced to resign from his post and when exactly it happened. He returned to Bolesław's court, and died as a prisoner in Rus, during a diplomatic mission in the name of the Polish monarch.

Over a hundred years passed before another clergyman whose dream was to convert the Pagan Slavs to Christianity appeared in Pomerania. His name was Bernard. A monk from Spain and a „madman of God”, he failed miserably in Wolin. His shabby appearance and clothing became the townsfolk's laughing stock. As Pagans, they expected a representative of an only God to possess at least part of His power. Another missionary who arrived to Pomerania drew correct conclusions from the mishap of his predecessor. Otto of Bamberg, a powerful and influential clergyman, had the support of the Duke from Gniezno, Bolesław Wrymouth. Accompanied by a squad of Polan warriors, he set out in 1124



Small medieval church at Bonin with its semicircular apse to the east.

to Pomeranian burghs. The local ruler, the first prince from the House of Griffins known to us by name, Wartislaw I, gave Otto his support as well. Otto's work was concentrated on the greater towns near the mouth of the Odra: Wolin and Szczecin, where religious centers of Pagan worship were located. Both burgh cities had a couple of richly decorated temples devoted to the three-headed deity named Triglav. A considerable part of spoils of war was offered there, and important decisions were always preceded by augury performed with the use of a sacred horse. After some initial success,

the Pomeranian apostle moved further east. He reached Białogard, among others.

Otto's success short-lived, though. Soon after his leaving, a Pagan uprising took place. The worship of gods was restored and churches torn down. The missionary had to return in 1128. This time, he was backed by local elites. The second campaign turned out much more successful. However, both missions, albeit abundant in many interesting events described by three biographies of the missionary, cannot be said to mark the conversion of Pomeranians. They were only the beginning of a considerably longer process. The new faith was sooner accepted in greater towns. It was there where churches appeared and burials took on a Christian character. It is also there that archaeologists discover the oldest artifacts bearing a connection with Christian eschatology in Pomerania, such as small, silver or amber crosses. In 1140 a new bishopric, in Wolin, was founded. The bishop's seat was given to Wojciech, a Polish clergyman and participant of one of Otto's missions. In 1176 the bishopric was moved to Kamień Pomorski, located deeper south and therefore less susceptible to Danish attacks from the sea, who would ravage the coast of western Pomerania at the time. The bishopric was subordinate directly to the Holy See. Later, this was the reason for many conflicts concerning competence of the archbishop of Gniezno and the German Church.

The principles of new religion reached the backcountry much later. Proper Christianization of the Pomeranian society took place from the mid-13th century. It was then that a widespread settlement on Magdeburg rights policy was implemented. Many towns were founded then, and received their own administrative and economic rights. With the rise of those settlements, foundations for parish administrations were also made. Supported by monasteries, it set out to evangelize the people, which meant teaching the principles of Christian faith to the masses. Its other task was to execute the rules of ecclesiastical law: mandatory church attendance, burials accompanied by a priest, and accepting the sacraments. Archaeologically, this religious shift is mostly reflected in burial

sites. The Church strictly banned cremation of bodies and building tumuli over the graves. In time, also equipping the dead with everyday items or vessels with food and drink, necessary in afterlife, disappeared.

Let us return, however, to early Middle Ages. Mid-11th century was a time of crucial changes in Pomerania. Small, tribal burghs, the likely seats of local aristocratic families, disappeared quite quickly. They were replaced by great burgh cities, combining several functions – administrative, political, military and economic. Such were e.g. Białogard and Kołobrzeg. All this proves that the civil and administrative reform took place. It seems that it was a result of the rise of importance of the Dukes, who put their efforts into limiting the power of local tribal elites.

It was characteristic of West Pomerania that „city republics” formed there. These entities, as it is regarded, were virtually independent cities of key economic importance, where merchants from Scandinavia played an important role. Until as late as the 12th century Wolin and Szczecin acted as independent political organisms, quite influential in Pomerania. It was only after Christianity was introduced and after military struggle with the Danes that diminished the position of these „republics” and allowed the Dukes to subdue them. There has been a long-lasting controversy among scholars, where exactly the legendary city of Jomsborg, the name which appeared in Scandinavian sagas in 12th -13th centuries and which was supposed to be the seat of warlike Vikings, was located. Many researchers would point to Wolin, and therefore assume that the town was under Viking rule. Much, however, suggests that the name „Jomsborg” was applied to one part of the town only – the Scandinavian one. We cannot say that the Northerners did not have any influence on the town administration – but to what extent, cannot be determined. Harald Bluetooth Gormson, the exiled king of Denmark, lived among them and died there in ca. 986.

The enthronement of Bolesław Wrymouth in 1107 opened a new

chapter in the history of Greater Poland – Pomerania relations. Having dealt with internal opponents, represented by his brother Zbigniew, and the German peril, he set out to regain authority over Pomerania. Eventually, after a few successfully conquered burghs near the border, Bolesław managed to subdue whole East Pomerania in 1116. West Pomerania resisted a little longer. Finally it had to accept the authority of Gniezno, and Duke Wartislaw pledged to pay tribute to Poland and in case of need – offer military aid. In 1123 Polan army supposedly reached as far as the island of Rana (Polish: Rugia, today Rügen, Germany) therefore making whole Pomerania a Polan-controlled territory, together with northern Polabian lands. However, unlike in East Pomerania the Piasts did not remove the local dynasty. At the time, they strived to unify administration on conquered territories. As in other places, so in Pomerania, a network of castellanies – middle-sized units with a central burgh – was created. The burgh served as a judicial and military center.

In the second half of the 12th century the power of the German lords diminished. Denmark was the first to benefit from this, and in 1168 it finally forced the Slavonic Rana to capitulate. Rana was the last Pagan religious center in this part of Europe. Thanks to that victory the Danish king Valdemar was able to begin expansion to the southern coasts of the Baltic sea. In time, he subdued practically all that territory. In 1185 the Pomeranian Duke Bogislaw I had to accept Danish authority over his state. Valdemar even managed to get the German Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa to resign from his claims to Pomerania. The period of Danish dominance ended in 1227, when king Valdemar II was defeated by German lords. The latter thus gained an open route to further expansion to the East.

Mid-13th century marked the beginning of a process of deep civilization change in Pomerania. In that period, an extensive town foundation action on Magdeburg rights took place there. Many towns were constructed at the same locations where the earlier burghs had been, while some appeared in entirely new



The founding of cities in the 12th century was accompanied by the construction of large brick churches. Here St. Mary's Cathedral in Koszalin.

locations (i.e. in *cruda radis*). The settlers were granted considerable legislative rights – long-term tax and other payments exemptions. This was done to attract Western Europeans to move to Pomerania with their families. One of the chief consequences of this process was also the creation of a network of parishes. This way, something was done that the missionary Church could not offer – permanent access of the clergy teaching the masses of the principles of new faith. This process was also backed by monasteries, which received numerous bestowals from Pomeranian aristocracy. Particularly the Cistercians, who possessed large amount of land in Pomerania played an important role in its history. Both the male and female Cistercian Orders largely contributed to the intensification of the settlement process.

The 13th century was also the time of the rise of the biggest alliance of trading cities in Europe – the Hanseatic League, lead by the German city of Lübeck. In the period of its greatest prosperity the organization united around 160 cities, mainly in Northern Europe. In the 14th and 15th century it was powerful enough to maintain its own foreign policy independent of any state authorities, sometimes contradictory to its interest. This was the reason for numerous conflicts, sometimes even armed.

West Pomerania, located between quickly developing areas of north Germany and the Polish-controlled East Pomerania was forced to resort to radical administrative and economic reforms, in order to meet the new demands of geopolitics of the time. The main focus became the above-mentioned action of town founding on Magdeburg rights. Step by step, the greater towns of Pomerania joined the Hanza, becoming part of the long-distance trade exchange reaching as far as London in the west and Novgorod in the east. The thick forests cleared in many places and therefore new grounds for building rural settlements and fields, which were the base for sustenance and income for most of the inhabitants of Pomerania.

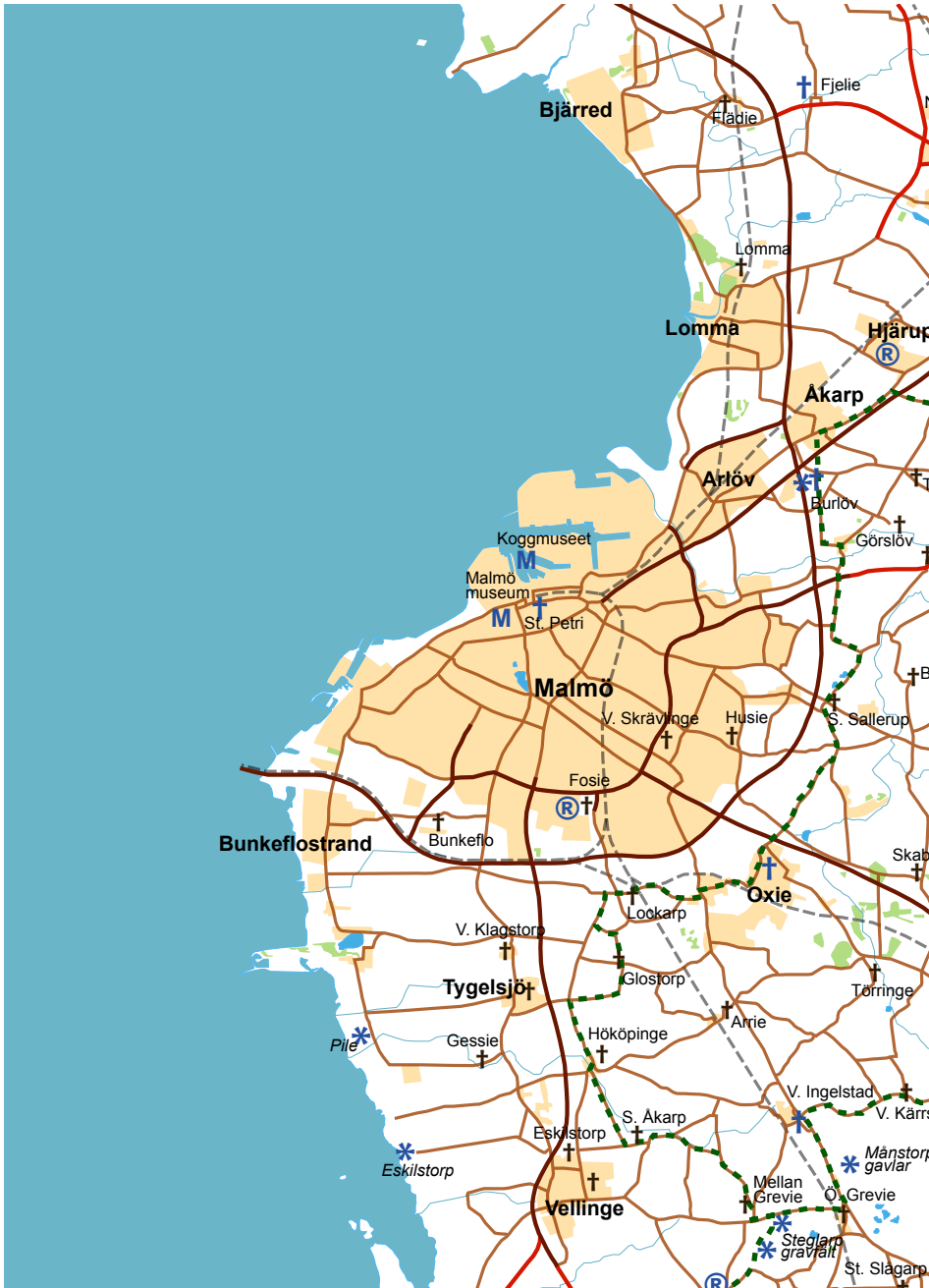
Places to visit



Map of the areas mentioned in this book.

The following pages list selected places of historical interest in the areas marked on the map. For further information on these sites, please visit: **www.bikethebaltic.eu**. Content in the form of texts, maps and suggested bicycle routes in the three areas can also be downloaded to your computer or mobile phone.

Cycling is an exciting way to get about. You experience a lot more from behind the handlebars of a bike than from behind the steering wheel of a car. The three areas in three different countries that are the topic of this book are also well suited for cycling holidays. Fantastic scenery and friendly people await you!



Scania

Burlöv Church. Very well preserved medieval church. Tower and porch (vapenhus) built during the 13th and 14th centuries. The old vicarage nearby is also a museum.

Ring Moat at Eskilstorp. Sited on the beach, a circular moat that probably surrounded a mound used as a defence post for the war harbour at Foteviken in Viking times.

Fjelie Church. Very well preserved medieval church with exquisite wall paintings from the 14th and 15th centuries.

Runestone at Fosite. Runestone from the late 10th century. The church is of medieval origin but has undergone significant reconstruction.

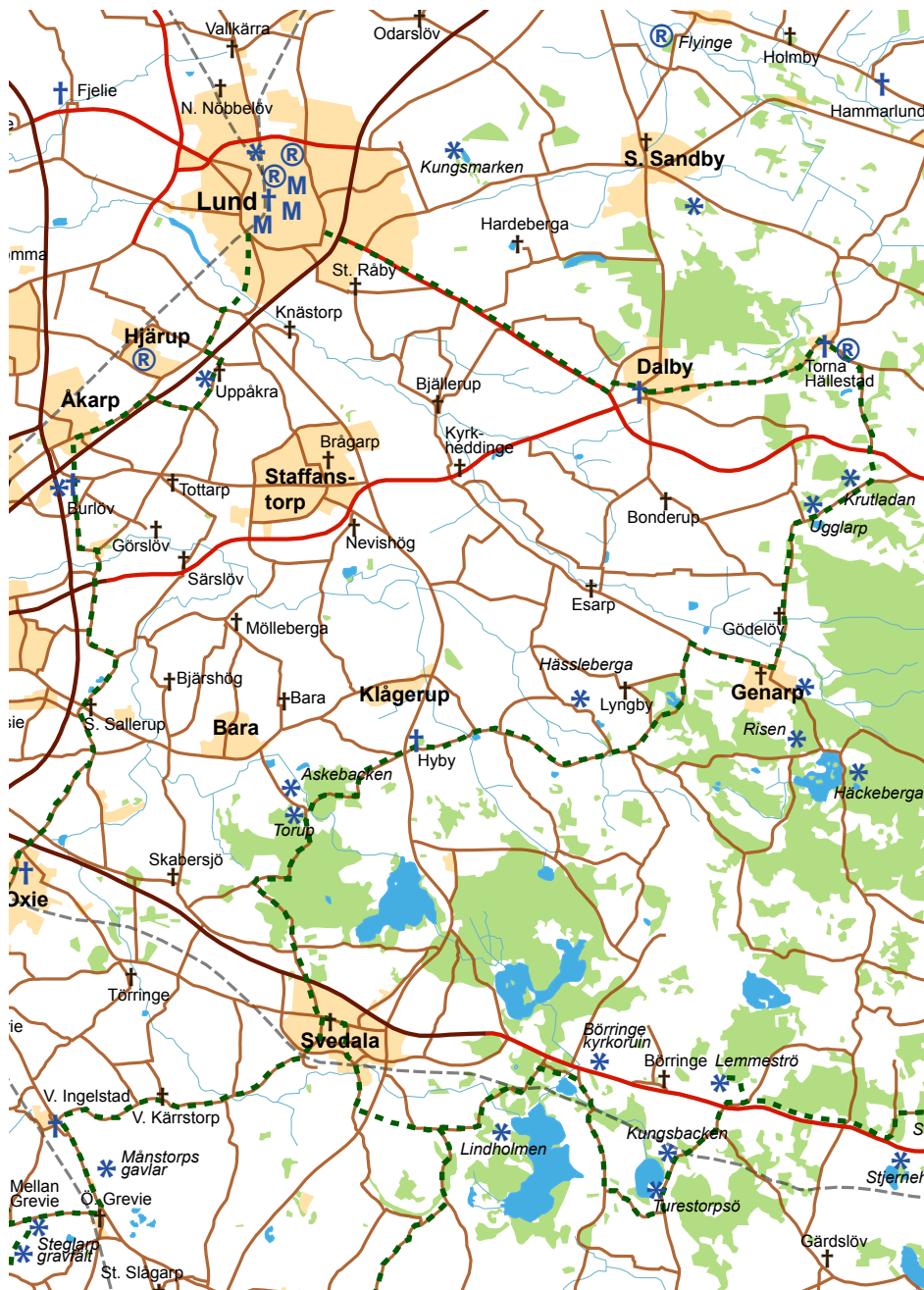
City of Malmö. The church of St. Petri, built at the beginning of the 14th century, is one of Scania's largest from this time. The Merchant's chapel (Krämarkapellet) has unique and famous wall paintings from the late Middle Ages. The city also has a number of well preserved buildings from this period. Malmö museum has fine collections from the Viking and Middle Ages.

Oxie Church. Medieval church with an interesting south portal and a sculpted font. Both are from ca 1150 and crafted by the anonymous master stonemason, known as the Oxie master. (Oxiemästaren).

Moat at Pile. Traces can be seen on the beach of a medieval round double moat. A mound in its centre probably had a wooden tower on it.

Södra Sallerup Church. Medieval church in a beautiful setting. Contains a few period features.

Västra Ingelstad Church. Beautiful medieval church with a costly, ornate German altarpiece dating from 1520.



Askebacken and Torup castle. The impressive castle at Torup was built during the first half of the 16th century. The park is open to the public. A few hundred metres to the north-west, faint traces can be seen in the grass of the old castle walls of Askebaken.

Dalby Church. One of Scandinavia's oldest stone churches. The nave is from the 11th century; the large west tower was built at the beginning of the 12th century. There are remains of a monastery north of the church.

City of Lund. Lund was probably founded in the 980s. There are two impressive museums with many exhibits from the Viking and Middle Ages: *the University Historical Museum* and the *Museum of Cultural History*. There is also *Drottens museum*, a small museum underground showing medieval ruins under archaeological investigation. *Lund Cathedral* is a unique rarity; its construction began during the 1080s. About a hundred metres north of the cathedral is *the runestone mound*, which has many runestones transported here from the rest of Scania. One of the tallest Scandinavian runestones can be seen in the entrance to the *University library*. Immediately west of Lund railway station stands *St. Peter's Church*, which was once part of a nunnery on the site.

Månstorp Gables. Impressive ruins of a castle built in the middle of the 16th century by a Danish royal adviser (consiliarius regis).

Church and runestones in Torna Hällestad. Three runestones that tell of a battle in the 980s have been incorporated into the church's east walls. The church also has some beautiful wall paintings from the 15th century.

Viking graves at Ugglarp. Right next to the farm stands the second largest stone ship in Scania from the early Iron Age.

Uppåkra. Site of a large settlement from the 1st to the 10th century. Excavations have revealed well preserved traces of a heathen temple and a large longhouse for festivities. The site's unique finds can be seen at the University Historical Museum in Lund.



Falsterbo. *The church in Falsterbo* was built in the 14th century and contains some interesting medieval items, among them the altarpiece. *Falsterbo museum* has some fine collections, from medieval times to the present. The museum also incorporates an old farmhouse, typical of the area, "*Andreas Lundbergsgården*". The medieval *Falsterbo Castle* was first mentioned in a written source in 1311. It was demolished during the 16th century; remains of the castle walls can still be seen today. "*Kolabacken*", Swedish for coal hill, is the site of one of the oldest beacons in Scandinavia, first mentioned in A.D. 1222.

Foteviken Museum. Scandinavia's largest archaeological open-air museum, comprising a full-scale reconstruction of a Viking Age settlement. During the Viking Age, the annual Halör market, one of the biggest market events in all of Scandinavia, took place here.

Runestones at Fuglie. Two runestones from the Viking Age; one by the church tower, one in a garden on the top of a burial mound about 60 metres north-east of the church. Some stone steps lead up to the garden from the road.

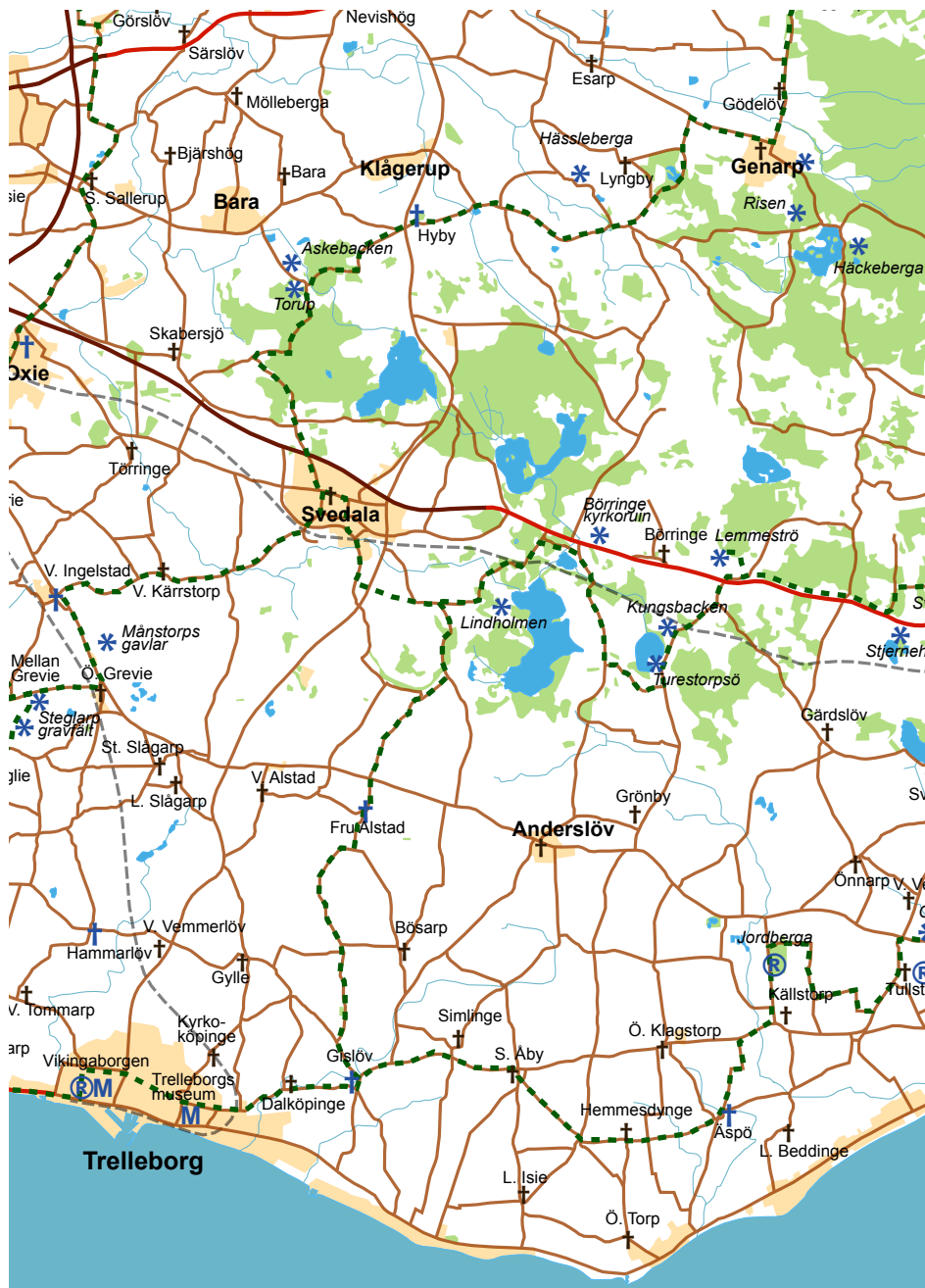
Hammarlöv Church. Early medieval church with a round west tower.

Mound wall at Kämpinge. From the beach at Kämpinge there is a long mound wall dating from the 11th century extending up to the village. The Amber museum by the wall is well worth a visit.

Maglarp Church. Well preserved church built around A.D. 1200, one of Scania's oldest brick churches.

Skanör. The ruins of *Skanör castle*, built at the beginning of the 13th century, lie just north of the church. Only the castle mound and moat remain. *The church of St. Olof* was originally built at the end of the 12th century as a small chapel, but was later extended.

Stora Hammar Church. One of the oldest preserved churches in south-west Scania, with an interesting interior. It was built in the 1150s, replacing the existing older wooden church.



Böringe Church. Ruins of the church built in the 12th century and demolished in the 18th century.

Fru Alstad Church. Built in 1430-50. Pilgrims came here in the latter Middle Ages. The nave has a central pillar with medieval runes and house marks carved into it.

Gislöv Church. Built in the 13th century, with a beautiful south portal and wall paintings from the 15th century.

Kungsbacken. Mound, in the 13th century the site of a small castle with brick buildings. Remains of brick kilns have been found west of the mound.

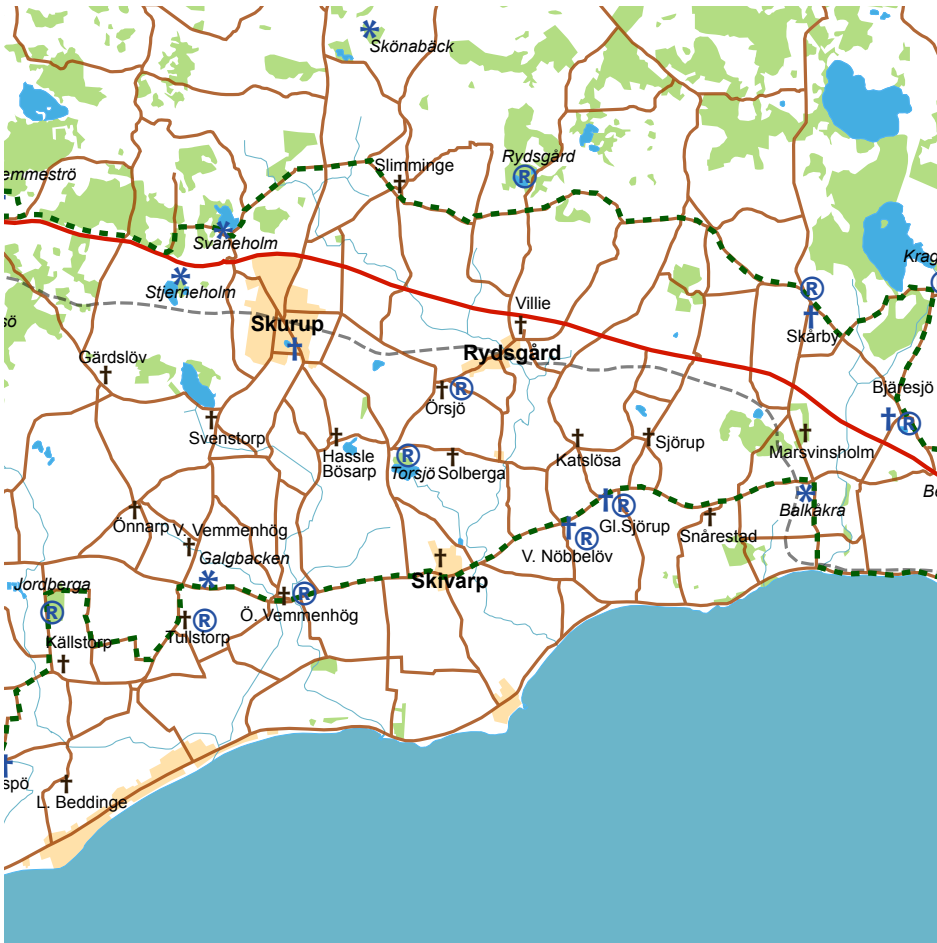
Lemmeströ. Ruins of a church from the 12th century.

Castle ruin at Lindholmen. The castle belonged to the Danish crown in the Middle Ages. Its brick buildings stood on a large rectangular mound. The Swedish king Albrekt of Mecklenburg was imprisoned here in the 1390s. The peace negotiations that were concluded here in 1395 eventually led to the Kalmar Union, the great Scandinavian union of Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

Trelleborg. The “*trelleborg*” is a reconstruction of the Viking Age ring castle built by the Danish king Harold Bluetooth ca 980. There is also a Viking museum on this site. There is also ***Trelleborgs museum***, with interesting archaeological and cultural historical collections.

Turestorpsö. Medieval castle ruins, consisting of a high mound with steep sides on a small peninsula. The still visible broad moat once cut off the peninsula.

Äspö Church. The oldest parts are from the 12th century. Extensive changes have been made in recent times, but the wall paintings from the 15th century, with motifs from the Day of Judgement, depicting many small devils, are of interest.



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Balkåkra Church ruins. Remains of a church from the 12th century. The prominent west tower was built during the late Middle Ages.

Old Sjörup Church. Built in the middle of the 12th century, on high ground, from which one can see the Baltic Sea. Near the church stands a runestone telling of a Viking who took part in the great battle at Gamla Uppsala, north of Stockholm, ca A.D. 980.

Jordberga runestone. Stone from around 980, standing in Jordberga Park today, with runes that tell of a person who built a bridge.

Skivarp Church. This church was built in the middle of the 12th century. In the 15th century the church ceilings were vaulted and decorated with wall paintings.

Skårby Church. Built during the 12th century, this church has retained many of its medieval qualities. The porch and the prominent west tower with its stepped gables were added during the late Middle Ages. There are some medieval wall paintings in the choir. Outside there is a runestone incorporated into the northern churchyard wall.

Stjerneholm. Idyllic ruins of a castle from the 16th century. The castle mound is surrounded by a wide moat.

Svaneholm Castle. Built in 1530 by the nobleman Mauritz Sparre. The castle is well worth seeing and contains a cultural historical museum with fine collections.

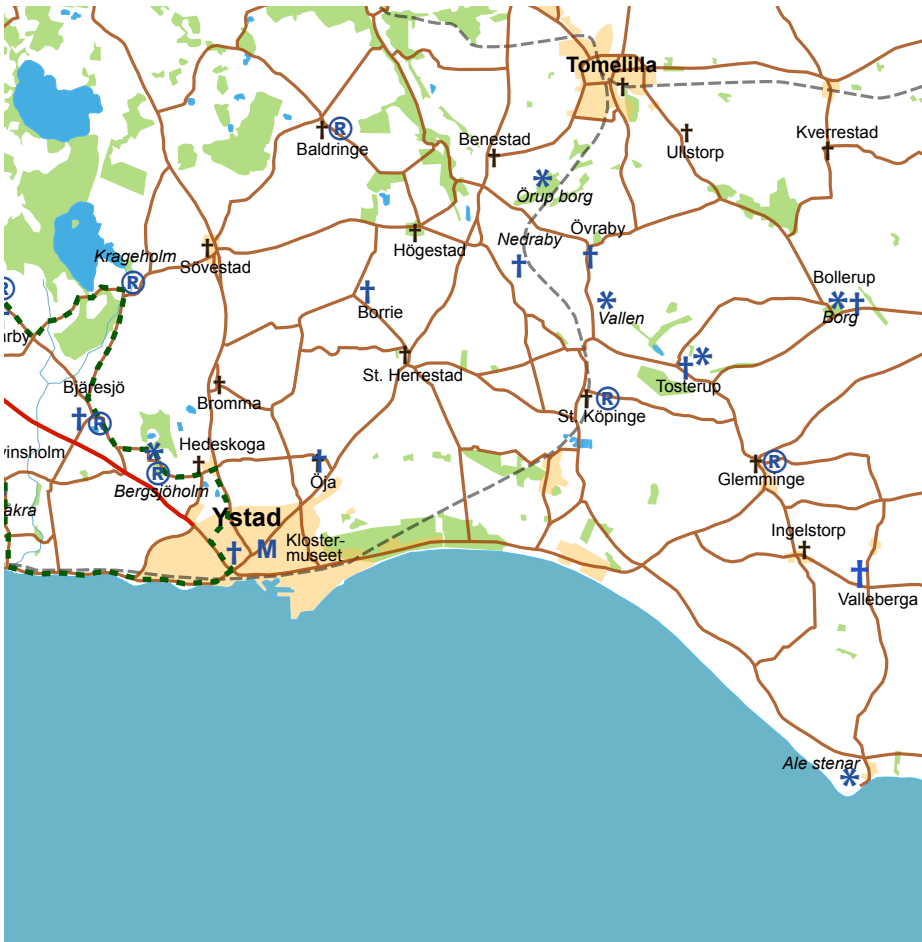
Tullstorp runestones and picture stones in the churchyard are Scandinavia's most beautiful stones from the Viking Age.

Västra Nöbbelöv Church. Just south of the church stands a tall runestone from the late Viking Age, ca 980.

Runestone and bridge at Östra Vemmenhög. The runestone still stands where it was once set. The stone is associated with an old tale and folk song from the 16th century. An old stone bridge is nearby.



Ale stenar



Ale stenar. This impressive stone ship is about 60 metres long and was used as a burial site from the 6th to the 10th century.

Bjärsjöholm Castle was built in the 16th century, replacing the medieval castle on the site. Two of the original four wings remain.

Bjäresjö Church. Built in the mid 12th century. Very well preserved interior, with a richly ornamented font crafted by the Scanian 12th century master Tove.

Bollerup Castle was built in the early 1400s and is very well preserved. Close by is Bollerup church with a round west tower and rich wall paintings from the 1470s.

Borrie Church. A well preserved church from the 12th century.

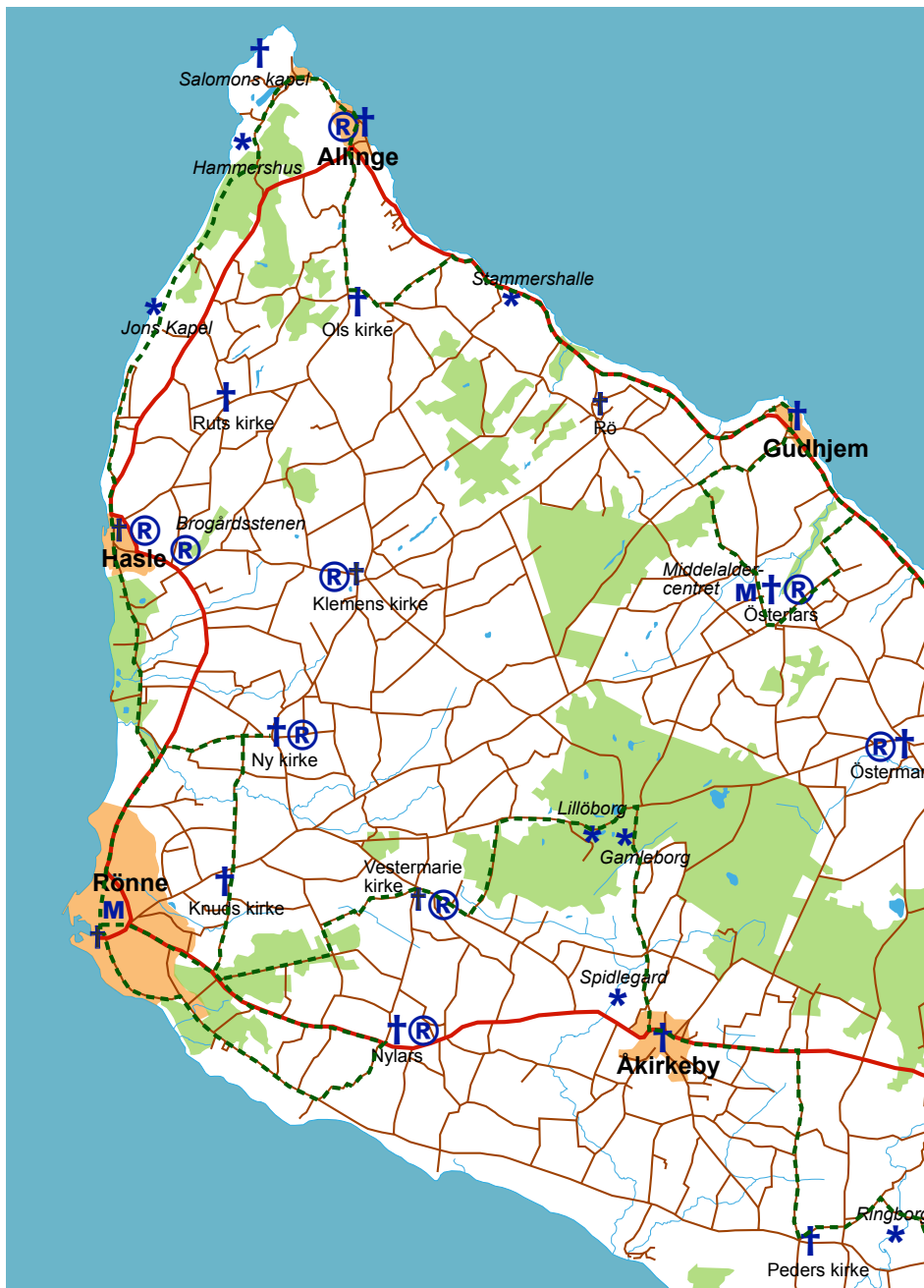
Picture stone at Krageholm. This stone is from the 10th century and stands in the park in front of the castle. It depicts a male figure, possibly King Yaroslav of Kiev.

Church ruin in Nedraby. Remains of a medieval church near a former royal farmstead (kungsgård) of the Danish crown.

Valleberga Church. Rebuilt in the 19th century, incorporating the original small medieval round church in the choir. In the churchyard is a medieval defence tower.

Castle mound at Vallen. Impressive traces of a large 14th century castle and its fortifications.

Ystad. The town has many well preserved medieval buildings, both brick and half-timbered. *The church of the Virgin Mary* (Mariakyrkan) by the main square is a well preserved building with many medieval details in the interior, e.g. the altarpiece, triumph crucifix, and wall paintings. The oldest parts are from the 13th century. *The Ystad monastery museum* (klostermuseum) is situated in an old Franciscan monastery from the 13th century; it has an impressive monastery church and very fine collections.



Bornholm

Allinge Church. The church was built as a small chapel ca A.D. 1500, but was soon extended towards the east. There is a runestone in the old churchyard.

Runestone at Brogård. This runestone is the largest on Bornholm. It was found incorporated into a bridge near its present setting. The stone was crafted in the middle of the 11th century, as a tribute to a contemporary chieftain's family.

Gamleborg, Almindingen. Once the largest fortification on Bornholm, originally used as a refuge when there was a threat of enemy attacks. Built in the Viking Age, it was reinforced and extended when it came under the Danish crown during the early Middle Ages. Gamleborg was abandoned in the mid 12th century, on completion of the Lilleborg castle that the king had built for himself further north.

Hammershus castle ruins. This is largest castle ruin in Scandinavia. Bishop Eskil in Lund started construction in the middle of the 12th century. The oldest part was built entirely of natural stone. An outer castle of brick was added in the 13th century. The bridge leading up to the castle is Scandinavia's oldest preserved medieval bridge.

Hasle churchyard. A Viking Age runestone can be found south of the church.

Jon's Chapel. This site consists of a deep natural ravine ending with a solitary rock on the seashore. Legend has it that a Christian missionary named 'Jon' used to preach to the fishermen here.

Klemens Church. The church is from 1882 and is built on the site of a medieval church consecrated to St. Clement, one of the earliest patron saints in Scandinavia. This indicates the original church was a very early one. There are two runestones in the churchyard.

Knudsker Church. This church, built in the middle of the 12th century, is the smallest church building on Bornholm.

Lilleborg Castle. The castle was built by the Danish king in the middle of the 12th century. The old fortifications at Gamleborg were then abandoned. Lilleborg was overrun and demolished in 1259 in the fights between the archbishop and the king.

Ny Church. Bornholm's smallest round church was built towards the end of the 12th century. In the Middle Ages it was called All Saint's Church and it was not until the 16th century that it got its present name. The church's central pillar is covered with wall paintings from the 15th century. The churchyard has a freestanding medieval bell tower. There are two pieces of a runestone in the church's porch. One piece was found in 1853, the other in 1859, during repairs to the church.

Nylars Church. This round church was built during the second part of the 12th century. It was consecrated to Saint Nicolas, patron saint of seafarers. The central pillar has beautiful paintings from the 15th century. In the church's porch are two runestones. One was found set in the porch floor, the other standing right outside the door. The runes tell of a naval battle off the coast of Blekinge in the 11th century.

Ol's Church. This round church was consecrated to Saint Olaf, (King Olaf II of Norway). The square choir juts out from the round church. There was one entrance for women in the north and one for men in the south. A central pillar carries two lofts, reached by a narrow walled staircase. There is a medieval stone bell tower in the churchyard.

Rut's Church. This is the highest situated church in Denmark, standing 130 metres above sea level. It was built ca A.D. 1200. There is a bell tower with medieval foundations in the churchyard.

Rønne. The Bornholm museum has rich collections from the island's prehistoric ages and also some fine cultural historical collections. There is a collection of thousands of the small thin gold foils with incised figures from the 7th and 8th centuries, for which the modern term is 'guldgubbar' (old men of gold). There is also a runestone by the church at Ny Lars.

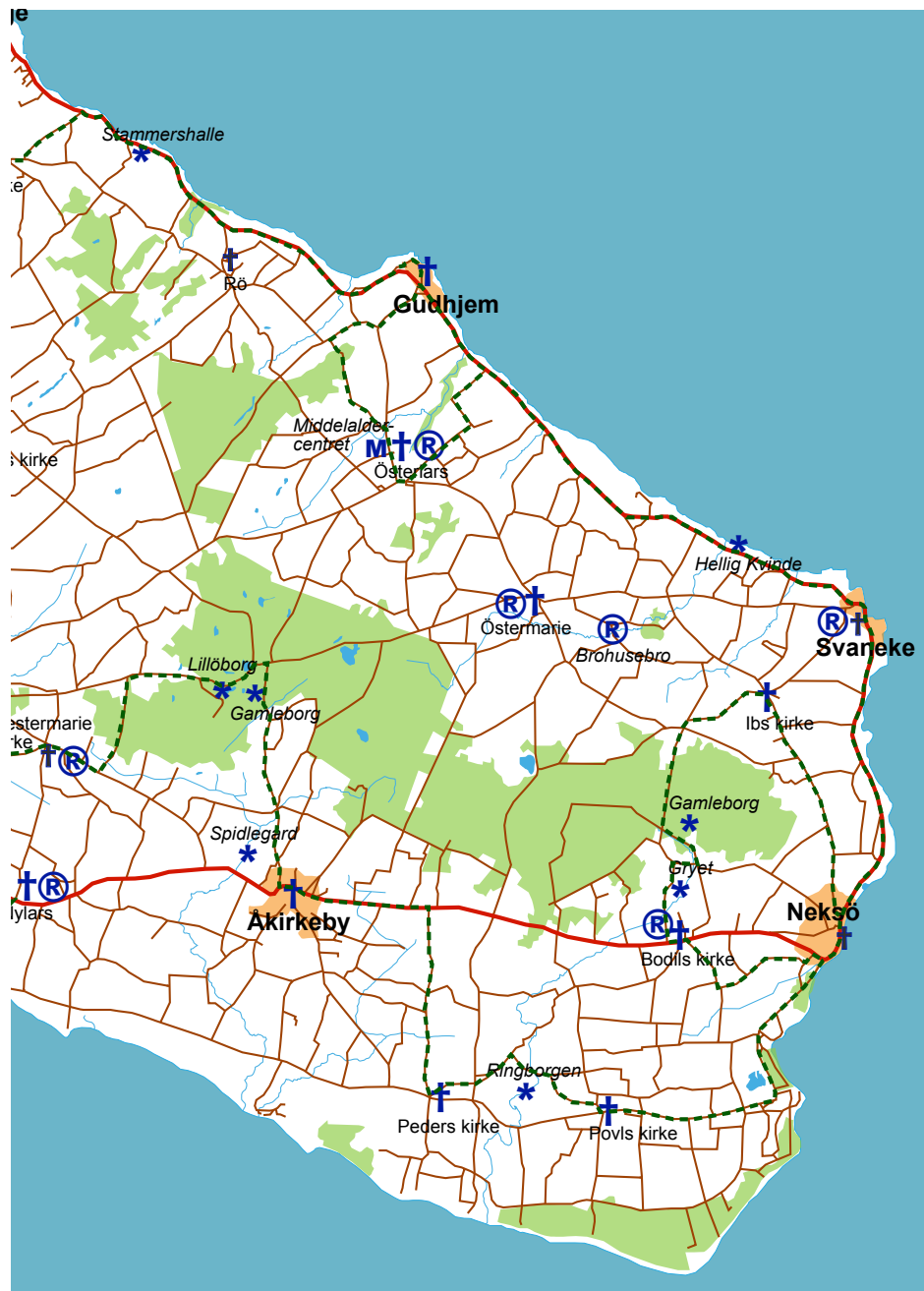
Chapel of Salomon. Ruins of a small medieval chapel. North-east of the churchyard is a holy well. One gets to the ruin by following a narrow path around 'Hammarberget'.

Stammershalle. Prehistoric burial site used throughout the Bronze and Iron Ages. Cairns from the Bronze Age as well as bauta stones (menhirs) and graves from the early Iron Age, A.D. 400-900.

Vestermarie Church. The medieval church was demolished in 1885, but the new church retains the original font and church bells. Five runestones found when the medieval church was demolished now stand in the churchyard.



Medieval frescos in Nylars church.



Aakirke Church. The church is the largest on Bornholm and was built in the mid 12th century. The prominent west tower is built in two sections, like a defence tower, with several storeys separated by stone vaults. The porch on the south side of the church was added before the 1220s. The font is from the mid 12th century and was made by the master stonemason Sighraf from Gotland. It is richly sculpted with scenes from the life of Christ.

Bodil's Church. This church was built in the 12th century and is consecrated to Saint Botolf, a name that has later been transformed to the Danish woman's name Bodil. The tower is from around 1200; the three runestones in the church are from the 11th century.

Runestone at Brohusebro. The runestone stands by the road between Østermarie and Ibskirke. The stone, split in two, was found in a nearby bridge in 1866.

Gamleborg ruins at Paradisbakkerne. Fortifications typically used as a temporary refuge when there was a threat of enemy attack. Well preserved remains from the late Iron Age, A.D. 400-800, consisting of stone and earth ramparts around a steep rocky knoll.

Gryet. Bornholm's largest collection of bauta stones (menhirs). The stones were set on Iron Age grave fields as grave markers or monuments. The site is about one kilometre north of Bodil's Church.

"Hellig Kvinde". A huge solitary bauta stone (menhir) traditionally referred to as the Holy Woman. According to legend, the smaller stones alongside were her children. The stones were probably part of a stone ship, a prehistoric gravesite.

Ib's Church. Well preserved church from the 12th century with apse, choir, nave and a broad west tower.

Medieval centre (Middelaldercentret). A large open-air museum with reconstructions of medieval buildings and settlements.

Peder's Church. Well-preserved Romanesque church with a west tower added in the 16th century. The church has two beautiful stone portals, probably from the mid 13th century. Most of the interior is modern.

Povl's Church. Built in the mid 13th century, it derives its name from the apostle Paul. In the 19th century the church was extended to the west. The porch was also significantly reconstructed at this time. The well-preserved south portal has several carved pictures, among them a male figure and a chequer board. There are also a number of wall paintings from the 15th century.

Ring fort at Bakken, Rispebjerg. A fortification from the Iron Age used to provide refuge when there was threat of enemy attack. A dry moat and 115-metre-long earth wall built along an elevated isthmus; in some places the wall still stands three metres high.

Spidlegård Chapel. Remains of a medieval leper hospital. These hospitals always had a church or chapel consecrated to St. George, the patron saint of lepers. Signposted from Rønnevågen, the chapel lies 1 km north-west of Åkirkeby.

Svaneke Church. Even before Svaneke became a merchant town in 1555 there was a small chapel on this site. In conjunction with reconstruction in 1881, most of the medieval church was demolished. The runestone in the churchyard was found near Bølshavn in 1819.

Österlars Church. Bornholm's largest round church. The northern, women's, entrance to the nave is in cut stone and is well preserved. The round nave has a round choir and apse. Judging by coins found in the church during excavations, the church was built at the end of the 12th century. From the choir, a walled staircase leads up to the church's two loft storeys. The nave's round central wall has paintings from the 15th century.

Östermarie Church. Well preserved ruin of a medieval stone church. It was supposed to have been demolished when a new church was built nearby, but when its peculiar construction was

discovered, it was decided to leave it standing. There are three runestones in the churchyard.



Aakirke church is Bornholm's largest medieval church.

Kołobrzeg. The Museum of Polish Arms present the treasures of the old Kołobrzeg and the history of Polish arms from the early Middle Ages to present day. Also an exhibition about the history of Kołobrzeg. ***The Kołobrzeg Basilica*** was constructed around 1300 AD. One interesting object is the bronze seven-branched candlestick, four meters tall. ***“Schlieffen House”*** is a building from the first half of the 15th century. ***The Gunpowder Bastille*** is the sole survivor of Kołobrzeg’s Medieval fortifications.

Budzistowo (in German: Alt Stadt – the Old Town) is the heart of the ancient Kołobrzeg. As early as the 9th century, it had a fortified burgh, which, as years passed, became one of the key administrative centers in this part of Pomerania. It was here, that in 1000 AD the bishop Reinbern, arrived in order to raise the first cathedral church. ***The John the Baptist church*** was erected here in 1222. It is one of the oldest churches currently preserved in Pomerania, once belonging to the female Benedictine monastery.

The burgh in Budzistowo is the remains of a fortress from the end of the 8th century. In the first half of the 9th century a mighty fortified town was constructed here.

The Łasin church had a gorgeous red brick church with a massive tower from the west. The temple was destroyed in 1955 by the Communist authorities. The same fate was shared by many other monuments in the whole Pomerania in the 1950s. The only trace of the church’s existence is a bronze grave plate of Peter von Kamecke, which is now displayed in the Koszalin cathedral.





Burgh hill in Mielenko. About 0.5 km north from the farm buildings there is an artificial cone-shaped hill, located within a string of moraines about 50 x 100 meters in size. In the Middle Ages the hill hosted a wooden tower.

Burgh hill in Mielenko. The hill is located around 100 meters north from the farm buildings and 600 meters from the sea line. Like the site in Mielenko, it is low and cone-shaped, 25 meters in diameter.

The Gothic church in Łęčno was raised on a small hillock in the first half of the 15th century. It stands out from among other rural Gothic churches in this part of Pomerania: it is larger and has a chapel to the south, which makes it similar to the town churches of the time. It remains a mystery who was wealthy enough to fund the construction of such a large building in Łęčno. Only the simple stone baptistery remains from the original interior.

The church in Jamno is situated in the middle of Jamno. Its history dates back to the 14th century, but the reconstruction in the 18th and 19th century entirely changed its Gothic character. The interior is decorated with folk motives, unique in Pomerania. Two emporas have paintings of the twelve Apostles on them.

Góra Chelmska. Here, for centuries, a center of Pagan worship was located. On the top of the mountain there was a big wooden hall, where in all likelihood, inhabitants of nearby settlements gathered in order to debated on important matters. The hall was surrounded by a ring of hearths. Nearby a burial site was uncovered, where the diseased person was buried in a boat. This rare (in Pomerania) type of grave was, however, badly preserved. We do not know whose mortal remains it contained.

After the establishment of Christian authority in Pomerania a stone chapel devoted to Virgin Mary was constructed on the top of the mountain. Visited by pilgrims from whole Northern Europe, and even from as far away as Rome, it was the most important pilgrimage destination in Pomerania up to the 15th century.



St. Gertrude's Chapel in Koszalin.

The town of Koszalin.

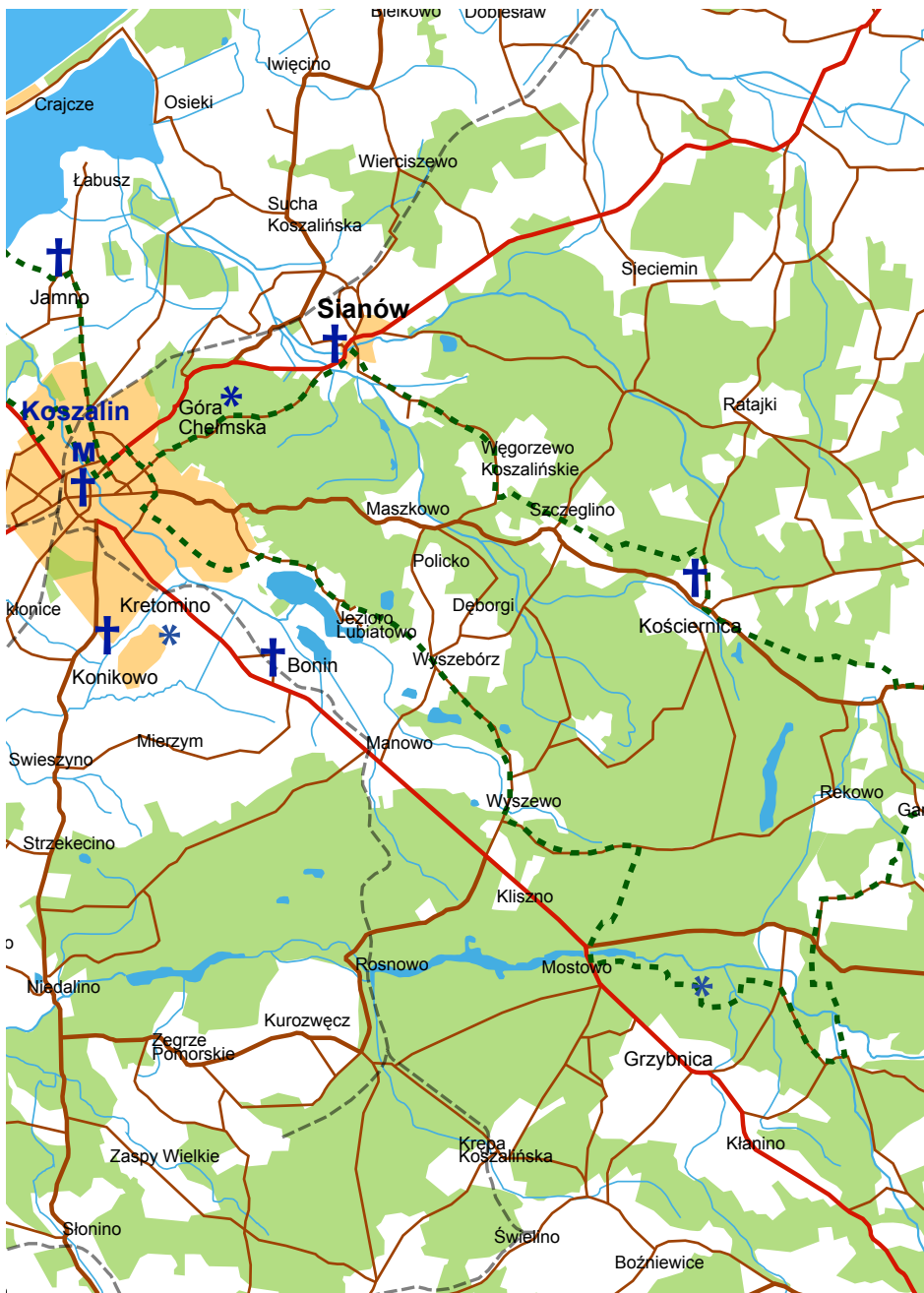
Koszalin was founded in 1266. The new city was immediately fortified. Initially, there was an earth bank surmounted by a palisade and moat. At the end of the 13th century the elevation of brick-and-stone fortifications was started. The length of the city walls was as much as 1600 m which 3 gates and 46 towers. The largest fragment of the city walls can be seen in the city park.

The Koszalin Cathedral was build between 1300 and 1333. The local female Cistercian monastery and the many pilgrims visiting Góra Chełmska co-funded the construction. Archeological excavations performed at the site showed, that at the moment of its erection, the temple was standing on a small hillock. Since Koszalin was not important strategically the cathedral was spared the fate of destruction that the basilica in Kołobrzeg met, and is currently in a significantly better condition. Unlike the latter, it has been rebuild after being taken over by the Lutheran Church. Side chapels funded by individual bourgeoisie families were removed, as well as much of the original interior decoration.

The Chapel of St. Gertrude was build in 1382 by the city council and authorized by the female Cistercian monastery in the town. Initially, it was located outside the city walls and it was probably a part of a hospital. Its octagonal shape is a symbolic copy of the Holy Sepulcher chapel in Jerusalem.

“The Executioner’s House” was the home to city executioners between the Middle Ages and the late 19th. The building was located outside the city walls. Today, it is used as a theater.

The Museum in Koszalin is placed in the historic Millers’ Palace. The exhibitions feature artifacts connected with the city and region. The Archeological Department’s collection includes objects acquired during digs in Central Pomerania, conducted by that Department. Here you can see the every-day objects, weapons, jewelry and coins originate from burgh hills, settlements and burial sites as well as from sites on the area of the city itself.



The church in Konikowo. The church seems to have been built in mid- 14th century. After the 1852 reconstruction, only the presbytery with a vestry and the lower part of the original tower remain in their original form. At the outside, the church have an ornamental frieze with a grapevine motif. The Konikowo church is one of the three rural temples in this region with a decorated facade. The grapevine represents Christ and the Eucharist.

The church in Bonin was built in the 15th century. It is remarkable, that Medieval sources refer to the morenes on which the village was built on the Three Churches' Hill. One may wonder what happened to the two remaining churches then. After World War II, the building was adapted as a restaurant and only in 1979 returned to the Church.

The church in Sianów. In 1330, a castle is mentioned in Sianów and in 1343 Sianów was granted town status. It was probably then that the erection of the church was started. The church was almost torn to the ground in the wars in the 18th century. Only the tower and the Medieval crucifix remained.

The burgh in Kretomino. It is located around 0.5 km north-east from the village. Today, it is in bad condition. It is estimated that the burgh existed here between the 8th and the turn of the 11th century.

The church in Kościernica. Next to it, there is a wooden bell-tower, one of the few surviving ones in Middle Pomerania. In 1801 the church was badly damaged when it was struck by a lightning. There are rich décor on the east wall.

The Stone Circle reserve in Grzybnica is one of the few necropolises of the Goths, migrants from Scandinavia, with preserved stone constructions, in Poland. It was used in the 1st and 2nd century AD. During archeological digs many several stone pavings were found and over 100 graves, both skeletal ones, and those where the bodies were cremated.

